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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1975
VOL. 36, NO. 2.

TWO COMPLETE SHORT NOVELS

NEW MIKE SHAYNE ADVENTURE DARTS OF DEATH

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Hot on the Presidential Campaign trail stalked Death's grim ally. Already, he had sent Munroe a warning. Now it was for Mike Shayne to find the man who severed heads for ghastly gifts 2 to 53

AN EXCITING NEW STORY DEADLY LITTLE GREEN EYES

by GIL BREWER

Out of the bottle and into the swamp; the murky swamp of suspicion and fear began when Cowan awoke. Charged with murder 54 to 83

NEW FEATURE STORY

ACCUSE ME, PLEASE

LAWRENCE TREAT 89

THRILLING SHORT STORIES

DEATH OF A BUTTERFLY

HERBERT HARRIS 84

REST ASSURED

JOHN LUTZ 104

THE QUEER MONEY

PAUL YAWITZ 111

DEADLY PERCEPTIONS

JOHN F. DOBBYN 115

THE CORNER ROOM

CLARENCE ALVA POWELL 123

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A NEW, COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE



DARTS OF DEATH

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Politics makes for strange bedfellows, and can prove to be fatal. A Mafia man, two of his business associates, and a severed head started Mike Shayne on a trail that could only end in death: His — or a future President's!



THE TWO MEN looked bland, suburban, in control of their bodies, minds and emotions. They were conservatively attired in business suits, soft-spoken, almost casual as they accosted Mike Shayne at his table in The Golden Cock that evening.

One man had a slightly bent nose. He said his name was Baxter. The other had a tiny mallet-shaped scar high on his right cheekbone. He said his name was Thorpe. Baxter flashed a badge, whisked it out

of sight and asked Shayne to accompany them outside.

The redheaded Miami private detective didn't stir. It had been a quiet, enjoyable evening meal at his favorite restaurant. He had dined alone; steak dinner with all the trimmings. Later he was going on out Biscayne Boulevard to Lucy Hamilton's apartment. His secretary was expecting him around nine o'clock. They had planned an evening of playing gin. At the moment he was very comfortable with a

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Hennessey's caught in his huge right fist.

He eyed the two men coldly. He figured the badge Baxter had flashed could be a trick buzzer. It definitely wasn't local. That left out-of-state, Feds—or the pair could be a couple of gunsels hired to drain blood from a shamus.

"Our standing here is beginning to attract attention, Mr. Shayne," said Baxter in the soft voice, "so we will return to our car. We will wait five minutes. Please do not go out the rear door. It is important that you accompany us immediately and quietly."

Baxter and Thorpe departed. Shayne watched them go, shaggy eyebrows low over calculating gray eyes. He was an extremely large, muscled man who almost hid the small, circular restaurant table as he hunched over it in deep contemplation.

He knew most of the guns in the city. Baxter and Thorpe were not among the repertoire. Of course, they could be from out of town: Atlanta, Dallas, Minneapolis, New York, anywhere. On the other hand, when a hit was contracted the word usually managed to drift around.

He had not received any tips in recent days. Nor was he involved in an investigation.

Things had been unusually quiet in Miami.

The detective used the thumb and forefinger of his left hand to tug the lobe of his left ear. Dinner at The Golden Cock had been a spur of the moment decision he had made while showering after leaving his Flagler Street office for the day. He'd had time to waste while Lucy kept an early evening hair appointment. Even she had not known he was coming to the restaurant. No one had. So if Baxter and Thorpe had gone to his office, his hotel-apartment, and came up empty, but had tracked him to the Golden Cock, they had a book on him.

The idea piqued the redhead's curiosity. But why would they have a book?

Shayne went outside to Biscayne Boulevard. He kept a sharp eye. He was not wearing his gun rig. A quiet evening had not seemed to require a .45.

It was a warm Miami night, the sky filled with stars. No moon. Baxter and Thorpe were waiting in a medium-priced, medium-sized sedan that looked used. Both sat in the front seat, Baxter behind the steering wheel.

Shayne leaned on the edge of the open window on Thorpe's side of the sedan. "My Buick is

in the parking lot. I'll follow."

Thorpe reached back and opened a rear door of the sedan.

Shayne squinted hard and then got into the back seat of the car.

"Excuse me," said Thorpe, reaching over the back of the front seat and patting down the detective. Thorpe was quick.

Shayne grunted and allowed the expert frisk. Thorpe showed no reaction at coming up empty.

They traveled a few blocks in silence, heading north, and the detective began to get the feeling he might already be a stiff stretched out in a casket in the back of a hearse. Neither Baxter nor Thorpe gave him a second look.

The redhead was cocked. Maybe he had erred. These boys were cool, efficient in a quiet way. He knew explanations could come in words or action—action like a stomping or a slug in the heart.

Shayne drew his feet back slowly until the heels of his shoes touched the base of the seat. He planted his feet. Thorpe sat silent on the front seat, staring ahead, waiting. Baxter concentrated on driving.

Shayne gauged the distance. He just might make it. If he pitched forward swiftly enough, maybe he could catch their necks in his long arms, crack

their heads together. It should be enough to send the car into a parked vehicle along the curbing, give him a few seconds. He might even get a gun from one of them. It was a question of where they carried the heat, in shoulder rigs or in belt rigs. Belt rigs would be difficult to reach.

"Shayne!" It was a command from Baxter, his eyes riveted on the rearview mirror.

The detective lurched slightly, stopped. Thorpe moved toward the windshield, putting himself out of range, and glared at Shayne. "Easy," he breathed.

"You're supposed to be a savvy guy, Shayne," Thorpe said. "Hep. Our make has you down as a guy who doesn't always demand or live on black and white. So just relax, play it cool, okay? We've got a few miles to travel and we don't have much time."

Shayne's nerve ends tingled, blood flowed fast. Thorpe and Baxter had his make, all right. Black and white was for eight to five bookkeepers who spent evenings in suburbia mowing grass or picking brown things from green things. Danger, mystery, matching wits, knocking heads was where he lived the hardest. They made him tick.

He sat back in the seat. Bax-

ter had applied pressure to the accelerator. They rolled fast for a while, then slowed, made a turn, another turn, another turn. Shayne kept a mental chart. Baxter made several more right and left turns, at least two U-turns and one circle. He was good. He would have lost anyone who attempted to follow.

Then they rolled in a straight line again and Shayne tuned his ears and nostrils. Miami was behind them now. The city lights and noises had faded and he gradually became filled with the sights and smells of water and shoreline.

Suddenly Baxter made a right turn and the sedan slowed. They rolled down a slight incline. Then they stopped and Baxter shut off the motor. Other than the lapping of water it was quiet. They had halted at a private deck. A darkened powerboat waited, a man outlined against the night sky at the wheel.

Shayne watched Baxter and Thorpe leave the sedan. The door beside him opened and Thorpe's fingers clamped his bicep. "Okay, Shayne," said Thorpe, "we walk. You remain between us."

The detective knew he towered over the flanking pair as they walked onto the dock. But he had no intention of bolting

now. Baxter and Thorpe exuded expertise in their work—and they had the advantage at the moment.

He was taken aboard a boat. It was not an exceptionally large vessel, but when the motor came alive, Shayne realized it was a power plant. He was guided along the short deck, turned. Thorpe indicated a railing bench, said, "Sit. It won't be a long ride."

From this vantage point, Shayne could see only the make of the boat and Miami's lights far South.

The detective estimated ten minutes before the power plant idled down. Baxter and Thorpe stood. They touched his biceps. He stood. The rushing wind was gone now. They were stopped and the night seemed deadly quiet. Shayne turned around. The power boat rocked gently at the side of a large yacht. The man who had been behind the wheel was securing the boat to the Yacht's side.

"We're going to board," said Thorpe.

Shayne was taken to a rope ladder. Baxter climbed up first, then Shayne, followed by Thorpe. The eerie silence of the large vessel didn't spook Shayne. Thorpe led the way to a cabin door on the starboard side. Light streamed from three nearby portholes.

Thorpe pulled up at the glistening white door, gave the redhead a vague smile.

"You enter, Mr. Shayne," said Thorpe. "He is waiting. He is alone."

Shayne stepped into the cabin. It was vast and luxuriously appointed. A man he recognized from photos and television sat in a deep, overstuffed chair far across the cabin. He held a large, unlighted brown cigar in the fingers of his left hand. His right hand was clamped around what the detective figured to be a glass of scotch or bourbon. Neat.

Ice cubes tinkled as the man slowly twirled the glass. The man wore a faded, pressed Western shirt, open halfway down his hairy chest, scuffed Levis and new black moccasins. The man sat slouched, long left leg extended, a bare right ankle cocked on the left knee.

"Hello, Shayne," said the man. His voice was deep. Large white teeth gleamed against the background of natural brown skin.

Shayne shook off the disbelief and moved toward the man, large hand outstretched, eyes squeezed together in contemplation.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Governor—and future President of the United States!" he said.



II

THE GOVERNOR of New Mexico was a rangy man of forty years, almost as tall as Shayne, with a full head of soft-looking black hair and a touch of cragginess in handsome facial feature. Bright blue eyes were set deep in sockets that were edged with permanent sun crinkles. His cheeks, forehead and jawline were smooth and a muscled neck was exposed by the open front of the red and gold Western shirt.

He also wore an air of inborn

instinct for survival. His body was flat, lean. His legs were long, but they probably were powerful legs, operated with spring and cat-like grace.

The Presidential candidate continued to smile and twirl his drink as he said to the detective: "Sorry about all of the cloak and dagger, Mr. Shayne, but it was necessary. I'm supposed to be in Maine, at the Governor's Conference." He looked very relaxed.

"So the newspapers say."

"I was this morning. I had you brought here as a Governor and Presidential aspirant; unfortunately, I am unable to ever totally escape those roles. But I am sitting here before you as John J. Munroe, a lifelong resident of the state of New Mexico, landowner, cattleman, sheepman, who needs assistance. That's all I am to you. Agreed? If you do not, I have wasted time and effort. . . ."

He cut off the words, flashed the white-tooth grin, waved the drink and drank. "I had to go the cloak and dagger route, too, Mr. Shayne, to get out of that damn stinkin' hole in Maine early. I'm supposed to be in New Mexico. I will be tomorrow."

"I came into this cabin on my own two feet, Governor," said the redhead. "Your boys outside aren't wearing lumps."

The Governor threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Damn, I knew I was going to like you! Cognac?"

Shayne nodded.

Munroe went to a pair of shiny doors in the cabin wall, opened them wide to three shelves of bottles. He took down a fresh bottle of Hennessey's, opened the bottle and poured into a glass. From somewhere in the interior of the shelves he drew water over ice cubes in another glass and handed both to the redhead.

"See? I know quite a bit about you, Shayne. And I suppose because of the campaign and press reports, you know considerably about me."

"Un-huh," Shayne nodded.

The Governor freshened his drink, pouring scotch over ice, nodded to a matching chair facing his own. The Governor slouched, cocking the bare ankle again, elbows braced against the arms of the chair, head back but tilted so he could look at the detective headon without moving a muscle. The grin was gone now and Shayne found the vivid blue of the eyes piercing. Shayne strode casually to the chair, sat down and crossed his legs.

"I'll be brutally blunt. I'm a target," said the Governor. "Someone is out to kill me. I know, someone always is trying

to kill politicians. As events have shaped up, in recent months my name has been mentioned rather prominently more and more frequently as a compromise presidential candidate for the Democratic Party: a compromise among the Jackson, Wallace and Kennedy factions. The Democrats' answer to Goldwater. That makes me a natural target, but the present threat comes from someone who is out to kill John J. Munroe, and I've got too many irons in the fire to be killed, too many things to do. Nixon's left too many problems.

"What I'm trying to tell you, Shayne, is if I had personal time I'd take care of this in my own way. But I don't have the time, and I believe you're the man for me. Hope you understand!"

"I understand."

"Background," said the Presidential hopeful, sipping his drink. "Brief. I'm young, I'm a bachelor, probably always will be, I'm wealthy, I inherited. It has still been a difficult climb from cattle man to candidate for the Presidency. As hard as Goldwater's.

"My maternal grandfather, J. J. Terrance, was a New Mexico sheepman; my Grandfather Munroe was a New Mexico cowman. Both were landowners. They shared a valley and

ten mountains, Terrance to the north, Munroe to the South.

"One day some men came along and wanted to purchase the five south mountains. The men wanted the minerals in the mountains. Here is where Munroe logic prevailed: 'Terrance, we sell ten mountains or we do not sell a mountain. If we sell, we get double the price and one-half the bickering. No use both of us having to take the bus to Santa Fe to get all of the papers signed. One of us can go and the other will stay here and take care of the valley. We keep the valley.'

"They kept the valley, Shayne, and my blue-eyed Daddy and my black-haired mother married, conceived. Me. I'm a lone whelp. I'm truly a loner now. All of those beautiful people are dead, my grandfathers at old age and my Daddy young, heart attack, my mother young, grief. I am the sole possessor of the land and wealth."

"With no immediate survivors."

"There isn't so much as a cousin."

"Okay, family greed is out. So what's in?"

The Governor frowned in deep thought, unconsciously sipped scotch and tasted the tip of the unlighted cigar.

"Three men are in," he said.

"Three New Mexico men who probably would pitch in any-time to help turn the sod for my grave. One is Jerome Jeremiah Jarvis, known as J.J.J.—or in my poker playing days as Dogear.

"I won a valley from Dogear in a poker game—yep, a beautiful green valley, five by fourteen miles between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. They call it Big Gamble Valley these days, but the name on the land title is *Valle Aureo*. I dealt myself a fourth Ace in a card game to win *Aureo*. There was a week of uncertainty after the game while Dogear debated about signing over the title. I think he weighed my being a cardshark, and I think he weighed welching.

"But unspoken pressure finally prevailed. It came from the others in the game, from those in and around Albuquerque and Santa Fe who heard about the high stakes. No one said anything to Dogear, I'm sure, but everyone was waiting for him to sign the papers. If he didn't, he was finished in New Mexico, and probably a lot of other places.

"Well, he finally signed—and he vowed to see the day the buzzards would pick my bones. The man remains an enemy, Shayne. If I were living as a John Citizen on the ranch

today, I wouldn't need someone like you. I've still got a little coyote left in me. But I'm not on the ranch, and I'm not in New Mexico where I know how to read all of the invisible danger signals."

"So, to Number Two?" Shayne said as he lifted an empty glass, crossed the cabin and poured from the bottle of Hennessey's.

The Governor continued, "Thomas Vernon, Santa Fe lawyer. He was my Daddy's confidant, attorney and tax expert. My Daddy, like my grandfathers, had the Midas touch. Everything he touched turned to wealth. He wasn't a greedy man, just lucky. And he never was quite sure what to do with the wealth. Nor was my mother greedy. They lived simply. They sought warmth and comfort and food for themselves and for me, but no more.

"Thus, they put the handling of a lot of the wealth in Vernon's hands. I think Vernon was an honest, conscientious man in those days, and I'm sure my Daddy paid him well, but there seems to be something about money, Shayne, that some men can't handle. Some men smell big money and they have to steal. I don't know what it is..."

"Anyway, when I inherited, I found Vernon's honesty had be-

come tarnished. He was siphoning. I didn't prosecute, or even accuse. I merely ended his services. He knew why, of course, he understands today. He remains a wealthy, successful member of the bar but I imagine he sometimes has nightmares about my swooping down on him. I have conclusive evidence the man is a thief, and he is aware that I have it. I can make the man a shambles in a matter of only a few hours. So I represent a tremendous threat to him."

"The guy might get a full night's sleep for a change," said Shayne, "if you were dead."

The Governor nodded. "Number Three. Raymond Fenster, the writer. You are aware of the name, I'm sure."

"Like I'm aware of Mailer, Miller and Williams."

"Fenster is a Santa Fe man too, and long before he gained today's popularity—several years ago—he was engaged to marry a girl named Marie Collins. I knew both well, particularly Marie. Buba Collins, her Daddy, was and is my neighbor. Marie came to my place often with Buba, and sometimes Fenster was along for the ride.

"Well, the wedding wasn't far off when Marie came to me one day with a problem: she was having second thoughts about

marrying Fenster. She wanted to talk to me about those thoughts. As it happened, I was going to the upper range that day to check out some cattle and I invited her to ride along in the plane. We could talk while flying, she would have privacy.

"Unfortunately, the plane had a malfunction. I made an emergency landing on a ridge. And we flipped. I got out without a scratch, but Marie was killed. Fenster blew. He screamed loud and long that I had been seeing Marie, that we had been having a clandestine affair. Not true, but no one was going to convince the man. Not even Buba who, being the sharp ol' boy he is, knew not all was right with his child and immediately accepted for fact why she was aboard my plane. Buba, incidentally, later became one of my prime backers on my political runs.

"Fenster is a different breed of cat. He fought me all the way, still is fighting me. Fenster is involved in politics. He became involved and keeps involved. He's in the Democrats' camp all right, but I could have a Texan running against me and Fenster would back the Texan. To a true New Mexico man that's like backing a lizard."

The Governor quit talking

suddenly. Shayne stared at him for several seconds. Neither man stirred. Then the redhead said, "And you're telling me one of these three guys is out to kill you?"

Munroe nodded. "Jarvis, Vernon and Fenster are the prime suspects in our book."

"Our?"

"Davey Ross Hathaway," said the Governor. "Davey Ross and I were roommates at the University of New Mexico and Army buddies. Davey Ross is Chicago born, an orphan, came to New Mexico to get out of the grime and into the sunshine. He remained, worked his way through the U. We became extremely close friends; we remain that today. Davey Ross is where I am. You don't often see him, he has no official capacity, but he is around. He is close kin—except for blood line, of course. But he is the only man in the world I totally trust.

"He's a good man. Cool nerve. He was an explosives expert in the Army. He's also a good organizer. And Davey Ross has the dossiers. He's been putting them together for about a year now. He has dossiers on all of the possible suspects we can think of. The dossiers tell us Dogear, Vernon and Fenster—not necessarily in that order—are the best candidates to make the threats and

possibly carry out the implication of those threats."

"Threats such as . . .?" Shayne asked.

"Mailed threats," said the Governor. "The first was a 30-30 slug, the second a hunting knife, and the third . . ."

The Governor hesitated, suddenly looked savage. "Shayne, a human head was mailed to me. It was the head of some poor damn—spic."

III

"I DID NOT actually receive the packages in the Governor's mansion," Monroe went on. "The packages were intercepted, inspected, as is all of my mail. So the State police, the F.B.I., the Postal authorities and others have been working on the threats for months too. And each agency has its own thinking, speculation on the source or sources. Some of that thinking-speculation is wild, Shayne. You'd have to hear some of the theories to know just how wild. But they are not your interest. Davey Ross and I have come up with our own speculation. We say it is a Santa Fe man we want."

"Question," said Shayne. "If you and Hathaway are so hot on a home state tie, how come you need me, a Miami, Florida

shamus? What about Secret Service protection?"

The well known candidate smiled. "I only get Secret Service protection *after* I'm nominated. And I don't want them in, anyway. This must stay strictly personnel.

"As to why Miami," continued Munroe. "There was a note in each package. Well, not really a note, just a scrap of torn paper with the word 'MIAMI' penciled on it. Block letters, crudely drawn. If you didn't know better, you'd figured the lettering was child's work. No one is buying that thinking, of course. The lettering was by design. The import is, I've been warned Miami is the target city."

"Could be," agreed Shayne.

"The national convention is in Miami Beach next month and I will appear as one of the nominees—I hope as the nominated. This convention of Democratic Governors in Maine was one of the preliminaries. So far, my faction is dominant. It looks good for the National convention."

"So I understand."

"The other thing: Fenster lives in Miami now, and Dogear and Vernon have business relationships here. Dogear is in the recreational site development business and Vernon is his consultant, attorney, tax



man, has been ever since I cut his ropes. They seek and get big money here, Shayne. Dogear uses it to develop and then sell recreational complexes in New Mexico: lodges, fishing camps, hunting areas, ski compounds."

Shayne squeezed his eyes in contemplation. "The only guy I know in all of Miami who can come up with the amount of bread I think you're talking about, Governor, is Antonio Cicerone."

"Yes, he is Dogear's money source, according to Davey Ross."

"Then Hathaway also must have discovered who Cicerone really is."

"Yes."

Antonio Cicerone was the president of Recreation Investment Corporation, a giant, complex, Miami-based con-

glomerates, at developed, constructed and promoted huge recreational areas anywhere—which could include New Mexico. He also was the biggest mobster in the southeast United States.

"Mafia," said the Governor.

Shayne grunted.

"And we understand," continued Munroe, "you have had some dealings with the man."

Shayne cocked a shaggy eyebrow. "We know each other."

"Is he the kind of man who could produce a human head to be put in the mail?"

Shayne yanked his earlobe. Cicerone could produce, and the Governor knew the hood could. So the question was moot. Anyway, he had a more important question. "This Dogear and Vernon in Miami right now?"

The Governor looked mildly surprised. "Yes. They are staying at the Glass Inn."

Shayne grunted, "Figures."

"Why?" The Governor sat forward suddenly, looked intent. "Please answer that, Shayne. It's important to me. You surmised Dogear and Vernon are here already. Your question was designed merely for confirmation. Tell me why you *surmised*—"

"You said Fenster, the writ-

er, lives here," the detective interrupted.

"Yes."

"And you're here. Very special trip."

"Yes."

"To hire me."

"Yes."

"You could've come down last week." The Governor went silent. "Or next week." The Governor squeezed his nose with fingertips, said nothing.

"You say you're ripe for a knockover. You say you've got three suspects almost in the can. You say Miami is the scene. On the other hand, your three suspects are New Mexico men. Still, you want a Miami shamus. You want him so bad you sneak out of Maine, and fly all the way to Miami tonight and have the detective yanked out of a restaurant and hauled out here to a damn—"

"All right, Shayne!" The Presidential candidate held up a palm. But he was grinning, broadly. "You think good. You allow logic to work for you. That's what was so important to me. I want you."

Shayne felt it now was his turn. "Why?" he asked bluntly.

Munroe turned off his grin fast. He cocked his head slightly and the blue eyes became probing laser beams. "I told you. I want this kept on a personal basis."

"Hathaway," said Shayne, "your personal bird dog. I get the impression he is a few cuts above being an amateur at sleuthing. Even if you leave out the FBI, the Postal Department, the State Police, you have Hathaway... So, Governor why in hell do you need me? I'm just a redheaded private dick!"

"You ever been in Santa Fe, Shayne?" The Governor looked grim.

"Once or twice."

"And after you leave here tonight, will you feel that we know one another?"

"No," said the redhead.

"But should you again be in New Mexico someday, and should I be retired on my ranch, and should you get into some kind of wrestle with a cowboy or two and need help, and you know I'm at the ranch, would you consider coming to me?"

"I might."

"Why?" asked Munroe.

"Well, hell, I'd figure you know the terrain, the people, the... Okay. Score. But I still maintain you have all of these other people, the agencies, their computers, the experience already on your team. And eventually the Secret Service. All of these people can't be slouches at turning up killers and potential killers."

The Governor was somber. He looked in deep thought and contemplation—as if he might be reconsidering all alternatives to finding an answer to a sticky problem. He rolled the unlighted cigar in his fingers, finally put it aside.

"Shayne," he said, "I want this dude found quietly. I don't want hassle. I want the man found, identified, dealt with properly. I don't want him killed. If Davey Ross finds him, the man is dead. The same is true, I'm sorry to say, if certain people with the State agencies find him.

"So I'm calling off the agencies, Shayne, if you take the job. I don't seem to have much control over how these people operate, but I can apply enough pressure to end the operations. I'll bring in the directors, pass the word. They won't be happy, but they will comply. We've got a good bunch of directors in New Mexico at the moment."

Munroe sat forward suddenly, elbows on knees, fingers interlocked and rolling. The blue eyes held the detective. "Three stipulations," the Governor said. "This will be our last meeting. But Davey Ross is in the city, in a hotel room, waiting. Should you need more information about our suspects, or even me, Davey Ross can fill you in."

"Two: no one is to know what you are doing, and that includes the local police and your friend Chief Gentry, the Miami Beach police and your enemy Peter Painter. Especially not newspaper friend Timothy Rourke—or even your charming secretary Lucy Hamilton."

"How about my dog?"

"You don't own a dog, Shayne. You never have. Must I go on about you? Third stipulation, the most important—when you have the man pinpointed, when you are *sure*, Shayne, you phone me. I'll be back in Santa Fe tomorrow, give me the name, that's all. The man will get a fair shake, I promise that."

The Governor ginned suddenly. "Okay, what's the going rate for private detectives in Miami these days?"

Shayne left his chair. The Governor also stood, reached down inside the band of the Levis under the colorful shirt and produced what looked like a small faded cloth sack.

"Presidential contenders never carry cash," he laughed gently, "but a Santa Fe man always carries a few jingles in the jeans—just in case he runs into a purty girl."

The governor took a fold of bills from the cloth sack and began to count out hundreds. "Say whoa when satisfied."

MIKE SHAYNE was returned to his Buick in the parking lot of the Golden Cock. It was a few minutes before midnight and the restaurant was catering to the late evening crowd.

The parking lot was jammed, well-lighted by glaring lights on the building. The detective was a towering hulk in the glare as he watched Baxter and Thorpe drive away in the nondescript sedan. He had been given a room number at the Hotel Tanner. He got into his car.

Davey Ross Hathaway didn't look like a cowboy or a Santa Fe man's Friday, or even Western. He looked like any other man of forty or so years who had kept himself physically trim and mentally bright and knew how to blend—by design or desire—to the times.

He had shaggy brown hair that fell in ringlets around an open shirt collar. He wore hip-hugging flares and a denim work jacket open down the front and with button wrist cuffs turned back one notch. He was five-eight and solid, with a thick chest and thick thighs. From the doorway, he inventoried Shayne from brown eyes set in a square-jawed face that featured a flat flaring nose.

He made a big production out

of studying the redhead's identification cards and Shayne scowled over the near-sneer on Hathaway's face.

Finally Hathaway turned back into the suite, walked away from the detective. He carried a single dart in the fingers of his right hand and a fistful of darts in his left hand. Shayne entered the suite, closed the door behind him.

Hathaway turned suddenly and fired a dart over the redhead's shoulder and into a target board that had been hung on the back of the door. The board looked as if it had been a target for centuries.

Shayne stared at the squat man. Hathaway matched the stare for a few seconds, his face hard and blank. Then he took another dart and fired again as Shayne moved out of its path.

Hathaway nodded to a flat black travel case on a coffee table. "There they are. Pick yourself a would-be murderer, man."

"Fella—"

"Knock it, Shayne!" Hathaway said harshly. The brown eyes suddenly were brilliant. "Get out your goggles, do your homework. It's all there in the case. I won't disturb you."

Shayne sucked a deep breath and stomped to the case. He snapped it up.

"No!" barked Hathaway.

The detective whirled. Hathaway had produced a derringer from somewhere. He stood now, feet slightly apart and planted, the tiny gun pointing at Shayne. He was a menacing looking figure, determined.

"The case doesn't leave my eyesight, shamus," Hathaway snarled. "You want to read, get with it."

Shayne took a step and Hathaway triggered a shot. The sound was little more than a snap. Shayne twisted from a frozen mid-stride and looked at the couch behind the coffee table. There was a tiny hole in the back of the couch.

A soft click sounded.

Shayne turned his head slowly and stared at Hathaway. The darts were on the carpeting and the derringer suddenly looked larger. The redhead knew it already had been re-loaded.

"Shayne," Hathaway said in a voice that had razor-sharp edges, "I don't want you, I don't need you. And my advice to you, man, is cut out. You keep the retainer, I'll fix it with Munroe."

Shayne didn't move a muscle. It was possible this was another Munroe test: Did Michael Shayne scare? Some men didn't believe in reputations; some men had to see.

Hathaway could be ~~the~~ the candidate's eyes.

Or Hathaway could be genuinely burned by Governor John J. Munroe bringing in a third hand.

Shayne went to the couch, sat, opened the case on the coffee table. When he looked up he found Hathaway still squared off on him, the muzzle of the derringer looking down his throat. A black cloud passed across the detective's mind. This was not a test. The squat man resented the interference. And Hathaway was as hair-triggered as Munroe had painted him. He had to decide his life. Did he kill the unwanted third hand and suffer, or did he relent and suffer? It all boiled down to Hathaway's pain level.

After several seconds, Hathaway pulled a deep breath and Shayne steeled himself. Then Hathaway snorted loudly and dropped the derringer into the single chest pocket of the denim jacket. He bent and swooped up the darts from the carpeting, fired one. The long tip went halfway through the target.

Shayne breathed easier. Pain level established for the moment. But he knew the reading was not a true level. Hathaway could kill, would kill. Hathaway merely had backed off for

now. He was a booby trap: touch him one way and he might explode, touch him another and *Bang!*

The detective leafed the folders. Hathaway remained a disturbing distraction, but it was a dart target that was being attacked viciously now. The target quivered with each Hathaway pitch.

Briefly, Shayne wondered if the long tips of the darts could penetrate a man's skull. He put down the thought and concentrated on the folders. There were thirteen, each wearing labeled names. He recognized three of the names because he had heard them earlier in the evening. The other ten could have been identities on graveyard markers anywhere.

He skip-read the compiled information in the ten dosiers. He was leapfrogging, riding the reasoning of two other men, the Governor of New Mexico and his sidekick. Neither was a dum-dum. The Governor was a collected man with open-air sagacity. Hathaway was big-city reared, wise to the inner workings, thinking, and skull-duggery of concrete canyons.

Each seemed to listen to, tolerate the other. And a detective had to assume they had gleaned, discussed, weeded, combined, come up with some right speculations or a detec-

tive could spend the next two years chasing down web-like leads in strange places.

Shayne minutely read the dossiers compiled on Jarvis, Vernon and Fenster. It required forty-five minutes. Hathaway continued to pitch darts. He took a single break to disappear briefly into another room and return with a gleaming can of beer. He did not offer Shayne a drink.

Shayne closed the black case. The only new information he had was on the writer, Fenster, and might or might not be important: Fenster was currently living with a third wife; and he was a Florida delegate to the national Democratic convention to be held in Miami Beach next month.

The detective weighed motives for killing, not the candidate for President, but Munroe, the man. Fenster's seemed weak compared to those of Jarvis and Vernon. Fenster had had three wives since the death of Marie Collins. Okay, some old loves nag, pick at the mind, the emotions. But to kill because of a dead girl after all of these passing years?

On the other hand, Jarvis obviously was riches bent, a vain, driving, perhaps arrogant man, a man who would be galled by being outwitted—or outcarded in a poker game. Jarvis seemed a man to whom grudges



were cancerous. And Vernon was a man standing on a trap door with the rope already around his neck. He had to be tired of waiting for certain death. Too, he now was teamed with—had been for a long time—the galled man.

There was an added ingredient: Antonio Cicerone, the Mafia man. Neither Jarvis nor Vernon had to be in Miami Beach next month to kill John J. Munroe. If the stakes to Cicerone were high enough, Jarvis and Vernon could be in Alaska when Munroe lay face-up, bloodied and inert.

Shayne's scowl deepened. Cicerone could have provided the human head mailed to the Governor. It would be slightly out of character for the man these days, not that Cicerone had mellowed with age, but the Mafia had changed over the recent years, smoothed many of its former rough edges. The gang remained tough, danger-

ous, cruel, dedicated, but the inner workings were like a well-oiled machine now and the outer image had taken on a suaveness of big business. The mob had acquired polish.

Still, some poor damn drunk collapsed in a black alley could have lost his head to the U.S. mail and his body to the fish at Cicerone's demand.

Shayne headed for the door. A dart thunked into the target ahead of him, quivered. The redhead whirled, head tucked in, eyebrows low, gray eyes flashing warning signals.

"One more time, Hathaway," he snarled, "and I'll break both your arms."

Hathaway stood like stone, a dart poised in his right hand. Then he lowered the dart and sneered, "I go with you, Red. John J. wants—"

"Hathaway," Shayne interrupted, "let's get squared! It isn't what Munroe wants now, it's what *I* want! And I don't need help! Play with your darts, stick your head in a sandpile, drown in beer—I don't care. Just be here if and when I might need you again. Got it?"

Hathaway remained rooted and glowering. Shayne went out the door. He knew Davey Ross Hathaway was an angry man, burning with resentment, a man caught between fierce loyalty and animal desires. But

Hathaway would stick; he'd be available if needed. He was under orders.

Shayne heard a dart thud into the wood of the closed door.

V

THE DETECTIVE shook his head and rode the self-service elevator alone down to the hotel lobby. It was early in the morning; traffic was light. He concentrated on Munroe's man Friday as he drove toward his hotel apartment. Hathaway had been a bomb. Shayne had expected someone in his camp; instead, he had a foe.

The redhead attempted to put himself in Hathaway's place. Maybe he, too, would be resentful if he had spent months gathering information about would-be killers and then had the case taken from him. Or, did it go deeper? Was Hathaway afraid? Was he a man who figured no one could do a given job better than he could—especially when it came to being loyal to and protecting John J. Munroe?

Shayne slammed the steering wheel with a flat palm. Hell, Munroe could get knocked off with the entire State Police surrounding him—if the potential killer was dedicated enough. One man—even a loyal

friend—wouldn't be that much a preventative.

Shayne turned into the hotel-apartment building, allowed the car to roll down the ramp into the basement garage and his stall. Riding the elevator up to his floor he turned his thoughts back to sitting opposite the Governor in the luxurious cabin on the boat. Munroe had said Davey Ross Hathaway was capable of murder; so were some other people. It was why the Governor had wanted an outsider.

Was that what had Hathaway fired? Had Hathaway reached what he figured to be the saturation point in investigation? Had he narrowed as far as he could go? Was it now time to strike? Was Hathaway capable of killing three men—not sure and not caring which two deaths might be unnecessary?

He'd done all the preliminary work, had his cases all built. And then suddenly there was a roadblock, a large redheaded Miami private detective named Mike Shayne.

Shayne grunted. Maybe Governor Munroe's perceptiveness was to be doubly admired.

Inside the apartment, Shayne poured cognac into one glass and water over ice cubes in another. He telephoned his secretary, bringing Lucy Hamilton

out of sleep. He jammed the receiver between shoulder and chin, fired a cigarette, and almost grinned over her sleepy words of recognition.

After apologizing for missing their date he told her not to expect him to show at the Flagler Street office in the morning and not to make appointments. In fact, if she still was looking for a slow day to go to Lauderdale with her friend she could hop a commuter plane with daylight and fly.

But Lucy Hamilton was a woman of perceptiveness, too, and she declined. "I have some catching up to do at the office, Michael," she said. "It will be an opportunity."

Shayne sipped cognac. Her answer meant she had guessed he was on a new case, couldn't discuss it; but she would be available should he need her.

"Right, Angel."

It was nine-twenty-five Tuesday morning when Shayne awoke. He rolled across the bed immediately and called The Glass Inn, asked to be hooked with Jerome Jarvis. He was informed Mr. Jarvis was out. He asked for Thomas Vernon. Same reply. And no messages had been left. The desk clerk had no idea when either Jarvis or Vernon would return. Could the desk clerk leave a name?

The desk clerk could not.

Shayne put the phone together, started the coffee and showered. Sitting in a towel at the kitchenette table he drank coffee royale and munched toast with a frown as he organized his day. He took a piece of toast to the phone book, found the Raymond Fenster listing. The address was an hour's drive. He dialed and got a sugary voice. Everyone but the detective already was on the move for the day. Fenster was not expected to return before five in the afternoon.

A second coffee royale took the edge from the frustration that was beginning to build. He'd try Jarvis and Vernon during the lunch hour, then catch Antonio Cicerone.

He dressed slowly, putting on a fresh suit. He strapped on the .45 shoulder rig and found his hat. No more getting caught short with the Davey Ross Hathaways and their popguns.

Shayne was a determined man, bent on getting some answers—the easy way or the hard way—as he rode the elevator down to the basement garage. A fresh bent cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth.

The Glass Inn was one of Miami's new motel-hotels, an edifice of gleaming glass and modern architecture. Shayne collared one of five suave desk

clerks who were bustling without doing anything constructive and learned that neither Mr. Jarvis nor Mr. Vernon had returned to their suites, and the desk clerk had no idea when they might return. Yes, each was registered for the next several days and the registrations could be extended with a simple word.

Shayne pointed the Buick across a corner of downtown Miami and into a lush business district where the highrises were sparkling white in the sunshine, the street shops catered to customers who could afford to walk on thick carpeting and the air had a philanthropic twang.

Recreation Investment Corp. was housed in the area's tallest building because Antonio Cicerone preferred to look down on people and things. The altitude also afforded privacy, another Cicerone fetish.

Shayne entered the lobby and picked out the loitering muscle without actually looking directly at any one of the young men as he moved on long strides toward the bank of elevators in the far wall. No one made a move toward him or flashed any kind of a signal, but he knew he had been picked from the humdrum foot traffic and that he was being carefully watched.

The boys were sharp. They were modish and very neat in appearance. But the appearance was facade. Behind it, the boys were wary, cunning, tough and ruthless, products of back alley survival. Cicerone had added the polish, put window dressing on the lithe bodies that harbored the rodent instincts. His payoff was peace of mind. He knew that shiny *Rattus Muridas* eyes were watching out for him.

Shayne entered an elevator, punched the button for delivery to the top floor. No one else entered with him and the doors moved together silently. He had little sensation of movement but he knew he was going up swiftly. He also knew he was being monitored. A hidden television lens was beamed on him; he was being watched on a screen above. An X-ray already had detected that he was wearing a gun and rig. He whistled a soft tune for the benefit of the guy somewhere in the building wearing the headset rigged to the invisible elevator microphone.

When the elevator doors parted, Shayne stepped into a large, plush foyer and was immediately accosted by two well dressed guardians. They approached him from deep leather chairs that were strategically placed opposite a wall televi-

sion screen that now showed the interior of an empty elevator. They moved in, spaced apart, stopped, kept distance between themselves and the redhead.

One was thirty-five or so and frowning slightly, the other was a kid who looked like he wanted to eat raw tiger to prove something.

Shayne kept an eye on the kid as he spoke to the other man. "Fred."

Fred Pinto nodded in mutual recognition. "Hi, Shayne." The frown remained. "Mr. Cicerone is out for the day."

"Tell him it could be important to him, Fred."

"He's out, Shayne. No bull."

"Hey, Fred!" the kid squealed. "This guy's heeled!" The kid flicked a glance at his partner. The shiny eyes didn't understand.

"Yeah, there's that, Shayne," Fred Pinto nodded. "You know Mr. Cicerone doesn't tolerate heat around him."

"If I left it in my car downstairs, Fred?"

The hood thought for a moment, then grunted. "Yeah, I know, some junior'd come along and lift it." He looked at his partner. "Adrian—"

But Adrian was moving. He shot an arm forward and Shayne felt a hand snake across his chest and inside his

coat. Fingers were groping for the butt of the .45 when he dug an elbow into the young muscle.

Adrian gasped and backed a step, his eyes suddenly round. Shayne shot both large hands toward the youth in a double stiffarm, but Adrian whacked them aside just enough to duck underneath. He came up from the carpeting with a right fist. Shayne caught his wrist, twisted, throwing Adrian off balance.

Then Adrian lashed out with a foot, driving a toe of his shoe into the redhead's leg. Shayne grunted and lashed a long sweeping left. His fist smashed against the kid's ear, driving him away with a yowl.

Shayne looped a right and caught Adrian in flight. His fist lifted the youth's head and flipped him. Adrian went down to the carpeting on his back and writhed. Blood oozed from his ear.

Breathing hard, Shayne glanced at Fred Pinto.

The hood hadn't moved. He shrugged. "Adrian's young. He's learning."

Fred Pinto stepped forward quickly as the youth started to come up from the carpeting. He popped a foot down hard against Adrian's neck, held him pinned against the carpeting. He looked at Shayne over his

shoulder. His face suddenly was dark.

"Fly!" he said harshly.

"Tell Cicerone—"

"Yeah, yeah...but get the hell out, Shayne! Give me a chance to cool this boy!"

Shayne turned to the elevator.

"S-Shay-ne?"

It was a gurgled sound from the carpeting. Shayne whipped around and stared down on the kid.

"I owe you..." the kid rattled, "I owe you a bunch of pain!"

The detective stomped into the elevator and punched the lobby button.

VI

OUTSIDE, Mike Shayne stood on the curbing, scowling against the glare of the bright afternoon. He took a cigarette from the crumpled package in his coat pocket, jammed it in the corner of his mouth. He fired a lighter, sucked the smoke gratefully into his lungs.

He knew he was being watched; he could sense the eyes on him. Cicerone's people were constantly alert. He also knew it was useless to search for the eyes. He had been told to get lost; the eyes expected him to disappear from the area.

He got into his car and drove

away without looking to the right or left. Fred Pinto could have been lying through his white teeth; Cicerone could be upstairs, cozy in his plush pad behind the foyer.

But there was no real reason for the heavy to lie. A red-headed shamus didn't make social calls on mobsters. And the top mobster in town didn't get to his lofty perch by being a recluse, listening only to those things he wanted to hear. The top mobster kept tuned.

So Shayne accepted Cicerone wasn't in. Did it mean that Jarvis, Vernon and the mobster had their heads together somewhere? Shayne ran a thumbnail along his jawline. He'd like to be sitting in on that pow-wow. Maybe they were planning another little venture in harassment—like bombing the Munroe's campaign headquarters.

Shayne spotted the sign of a bar and grill ahead, maneuvered into a curbing parking slot, had two drinks and a sandwich. Neither did anything to curb the frustration inside him. He glanced at his watch. Three o'clock. He decided to make an early run out to the Fenster place. Fenster might be the nervous type, return home around five, be told he had had a phone call from a stranger, and disappear again.



He found the Fenster layout to be mini-palatial. The house was a low, wide structure far back from the street and surrounded by heavy grass, large palm trees and other green things.

He braked in a widened area at the top of the U-shaped drive. No cars were in sight. Closed doors and windows across the front of the house glistened and gave the impression no one was home.

A maid had answered his phone call that morning. Shayne went up to the front door. The maid opened the door almost before he got his thumb to the buzzer. She was Cuban and cute, young and curious about the rumpled hulk looming over her.

"Mike Shayne," said the red-head. "Private investigations. Is Mr. Fenster in?"

The maid arched a penciled eyebrow slightly, then surprised Shayne. She said Mr. Fenster was in, and was at the pool.

She used an intercom box buried in a tiny wall alcove beside the door. There were several seconds of silence before she got a reply. "A private eye?" a deep voice said. There was a chuckle. "Show him here, Tara."

Going through the cool dimness of the house, Shayne said conversationally, "Your boss got home early."

"He finished writing early today," the maid corrected in the sugary voice. "I think he has reached a particularly difficult point in his new book. He was on edge when he went out to the pool."

"Well, he sounded relaxed on the squawk box."

"Oh, the edginess wears off fast once he decides to leave his typewriter. Through this door, Mr. Shayne. You'll see Mr. Fenster in his chair."

Fenster wore white knit swim trunks and an ornate copper necklace. His skin was a deep brown all over and his muscles looked toned. He was thirtyish and he seemed to spring up from a padded web-

bed chair as Shayne crossed the apron space of the pool.

Reflexively, the detective took in the surrounding area as he approached the writer, storing mind pictures of the layout. The thick green grass, studded generously with thick-bellied palm trees, rolled gently down to a clear area where a large archery target glistened in sunshine.

Fenster put a hand toward Shayne. His grin flashed, and looked genuine. He was a wide man of medium height. The hand was firm, the fingers squeezed briefly, then the hand was gone and Fenster cocked his head. "Shayne? An Irish private eye? Man! Your kind really exist?"

Even his speech was fast, the words clipped.

And before Shayne could reply, Fenster had turned again, waved an arm toward the umbrellaed table beside the chair he had vacated. The detective saw a pitcher of iced tea and a bowl of ice cubes.

"Some tea?" said Fenster. "It's the strongest stuff I drink so I don't stack booze in the house. I'll have Tara bring you a glass."

"No tea," said Shayne. "You remember a—"

"Hold it," interrupted Fenster, snapping up a flat palm in a stop signal. His grin again

was wide and his eyes went beyond the detective. "You have to meet someone," he said. "My wife, Francie."

She was on the apron behind Shayne, approaching. She might have come out of nowhere; he hadn't heard a sound. She was an earthy young woman with blonde hair worn high and puffy, like a giant mushroom. She also wore two strips of purple cloth across her lush body and pinched a marijuana cigarette in her fingertips. Shayne guessed the grass never was away from her lips more than a few seconds.

"Hi," she said, stopping and posing. She was blatant and stoned.

Shayne ignored her, turned and faced Fenster. "I came out here to talk about Marie Collins and a man named Munroe."

Fenster's face clouded instantly. "The heel," he breathed. Then he became hard, jerked an arm in the air. "Disappear, Pussycat."

An obscenity rolling from Francie's lips triggered her husband. "Get the hell lost!" he shouted at her.

She went past them, walking slowly, taking her time, and down the gentle slope through the palm trees to the clear area that held the archery target. Finally, she was out of sight

and hearing range and Fenster went to the webbed chair and sat down swiftly. He did not invite Shayne to occupy the empty chair near him. He toyed nervously with the copper neckpiece. His eyes were brittle and he looked cocked. He remained silent for several seconds before he clipped, "So what can I do for you?"

"Munroe."

"That sonofabitch," Fenster snapped.

"You harbor hate a long time, Fenster."

"So?"

"Hate deep enough to kill?"

Fenster arched an eyebrow. "There was a day that was true!"

"No more?"

"I don't know."

"He's a big man now," said the redhead.

"He's a politician—and he once zinged me royally." Then Fenster squeezed down his eyes and contemplated Shayne from deep thought. "My turn," he said in a rock-hard tone. "Munroe isn't dead; he's in Maine. So you can't be here looking for a murderer, yet you're spitting out death and Munroe in the same breath. He's been threatened, I assume, and he's hired an eye."

"The best known, newest Candidate for President of the United States has hired a

Miami private detective to protect him? That's difficult for me to swallow, Shayne. It makes me think you are a goddamn liar, among other things. Just who the hell are you? What the hell is your real pitch?"

"I'm a private investigator," said Shayne. "No more than that. I've accepted a retainer from Mister Munroe. He acted on the basis of being a private citizen, not the Governor, nor the candidate."

Fenster scowled. "Un-huh." Then he stood suddenly and dropped the copper necklace. "Shayne," he said, "vanish. Get the hell off my property, and don't return."

Shayne stood his ground. "You and this Marie Collins, I understand—"

"You don't *understand* anything, fella. Marie is dead; she has been for years. Munroe killed her. If Munroe's life has been threatened, if that threat is unrelated to his position as Governor or candidate, if you're looking for motive, if you're looking for someone who won't blink an eye when the bastard's toes turn up for the last time, you've come to one of the right people. Me, Raymond Clarence Fenster. But that's where it ends for you, Mr. Shayne. It ends right in front of the beginning. Get lost."

"There's a convention coming

up," pressed Shayne. "And you're a delegate."

"Ahhh," said Fenster with a cold twist of mouth. "Opportunity. Beautiful, man. Goddamnit, do you get out of here or do I call legitimate police?"

Cops would want explanations. And the Governor wanted a quiet investigation. There was no weighing that one. Anyway, the redhead had what he wanted for the moment. Fenster was suspect. Fenster's hate for Munroe—its root being the death of Marie Collins, politics, or the combination—was deep-seated.

The door of the house opened as Shayne marched back across the pool apron and the detective figured Tara, the maid, was wired in or had been watching. Then he saw her eyes round suddenly, and he careened to the left as she slammed shut the door. An arrow thunked into the wood of the door and quivered violently.

Shayne spun around and dropped to his right knee as he snaked the .45 from its holster. Fenster was on top of him, grabbing his wrist and turning the gun aside with surprising strength.

"Hold it, Shayne!" he yelped. "Let me handle this!"

He freed the detective and ran around the pool to the far end. His blonde wife stood

there, feet planted, face blank, eyes not seeing anything, a bow in her hand, a sheath of arrows on her back, the strap from the sheath cutting diagonally down across her bikinied middle. Her right elbow was high, the hand taking out another arrow. She was fitting it as Fenster leaped at her.

He snapped the arrow into two pieces, spun her, yanked the remaining arrows from the sheath and broke them across his knee. Then he sprinted back to Shayne. His face was dark, muscles ticcing in his cheeks and jawline.

"You ignored her when you came here, Shayne," he hissed. "You shouldn't have. She is used to getting attention."

Shayne stomped through the house, the maid ahead of him. She held the front door open for his departure without a word. He pounded down to his car.

Darts, arrows. Could he expect a spear next?

VII

A POLISHED desk clerk at the Glass Inn informed Mike Shayne that Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Vernon had been in, but had departed for the evening, leaving a mess they would not return before eleven p.m. The desk clerk did not know where they had gone for the evening.

Why had they left the desk message?

"I believe Mr. Jarvis is expecting a telephone call, sir."

"From whom?" Shayne asked.

"He did not say, sir."

"Should either come in before eleven, I'll be in the bar."

Shayne stood in the lobby, scowl deep. Jarvis was expecting a phone call. From Cicerone? Hell, he could be expecting a call from anyone. So were Jarvis, Vernon and Cicerone together for the evening? It was a possibility.

Shayne went to a public phone and called Davey Ross Hathaway. "Any special places Jarvis and Vernon might dine?"

"How would I know?" snapped Hathaway.

"You're supposed to have the book on them, pal."

"They usually spend their evenings in."

"They're not tonight. Okay, I'm at the Glass Inn. Jarvis and Vernon are expected back by eleven. Meanwhile, in case your brain starts working and you come up with the name of a joint or two in town they frequent, you can call me in the bar. I'm hanging my hat until they show."

Jarvis and Vernon had not returned to the motel by midnight. Nor did Shayne receive a phone call from Hathaway. He

finally went to his hotel apartment. He was in a sour frame of mind. The day had been frustrating.

In his apartment, he had just poured a cognac when the door buzzer sounded. He scowled. It was almost one o'clock in the morning. Could it be Hathaway coming around? Had the candidate's team leader decided to quit fighting the odds, and join the team?

Shayne yanked the door open. The man who stood before him was equal in physical stature and lumps. He had a tiny chin scar and a permanent knot above his right eyebrow. His left ear was bent out of shape. He looked as if he had climbed into too many boxing rings—and the first time had been one too many. He didn't look like a winner.

He also held a .32 in his left hand and his eyes were dark and flat as he backed Shayne into the apartment. The man kicked the door shut behind him.

"Messenger boy," he graved, and he lashed upward with the gun, aiming the front sight at Shayne's jaw in a wicked slicing motion.

Shayne tucked his jaw and stepped back. The muzzle of the .32 nicked his forehead a glancing blow. The man followed with a roundhouse right swing,

his fist smashing against Shayne's ear and sending him reeling.

Shayne got his palms up and banged into a wall. Then he dropped to his knees and came around fast. The heavy was leaping at him. Shayne shot a straight right into the man's middle as the gun came down against his shoulder.

Pain streaked up Shayne's neck into his head and splayed down through his body. He sagged, but he still had enough presence of mind to pitch to the carpeting and roll.

He came up on hands and knees, looked for his attacker.

The heavy was moving in again, his ugly face contorted, body in a crouch, hands waving down low in front of him. He still had a grip on the .32. But Shayne sensed the heavy had not come to kill. The .32 probably wasn't even loaded. The man was using it as a club.

The man feinted with his right hand. Shayne didn't flinch. The man faked a slash with the gun. Shayne remained like a statue, strength flowing back into his body, the tingling of pain and dead nerve ends fading. His confidence swelled. The man had turned cautious, was eyeing the redhead in a new light. He probably had come to the apartment figuring to lean fast and hard and then

disappear. But he had discovered he was not leaning on the average John Citizen.

Shayne leaped to his feet and attacked. He shot a left toward the mug's face and followed with a roundhouse right. The heavy warded off both blows, but he lost the gun. Then he became a boxer, instinct guiding him.

He moved in on Shayne and they faked and danced around the room, jabbing, feinting, neither making a serious move toward delivering a solid blow. Shayne felt as if he was being pushed on the back side of confidence again. The mug was an ex-boxer; the detective was not. The mug, punk that he might be, had the distinct advantage if they went by the fundamentals and skills of boxing.

The .32 was on the carpeting. Shayne caught the glint of the gun in the corner of his eye. He circled the mug again, edging toward the automatic. Suddenly he dropped to one knee and swept up the gun.

The move startled the mug. He stopped moving for just an instant. It was enough for Shayne. He brought the gun around in a backhanded swing and smashed it against the mug's kneecap.

The man howled and doubled. Then he danced on one foot, holding the injured leg.

Shayne smashed a fist into his kidney, sending him pitching across the room. The heavy went down with another yelp. Shayne landed on his back hard, slamming a knee into the man's spine. He caught hair and jerked the man's head back and held him pinned while he sucked air.

Shayne had it figured. Only that day a young hood had promised him pain. The kid had sent dumb muscle, staked the muscle outside the hotel apartment building. The muscle had watched the detective arrive in the basement garage.

The kid was crazy. If Cicerone got wind of how his boy had taken things in his own hands, the kid would be wearing toothpicks in his eyeballs. Cicerone believed in discipline; he did not tolerate independent action. The mob, like an army, ticked on combined thinking and orders.

"Okay, okay," gasped the hood in Shayne's grasp, "I've had enough."

Shayne released him, then stood up. The heavy rolled slowly onto his back, and sat up. His face was screwed up in a combination of pain and apprehension. He grasped his leg, bobbed. "I think . . . you smashed my kneecap."

Shayne looked inside the .32, found it empty, and dropped it

on the heavy's lap. The man flinched, looked up, stared wild-eyed.

"Get out," snarled the redhead, "and tell the kid to head West—before Cicerone feeds him to the sharks."

The heavy shook his head, looked puzzled. "Who's . . . who's Cicerone?"

Shayne snorted. "Out."

"Fenster, that's his name, Jake said his name was Fenster," the heavy said in confusion.

Shayne bent and grabbed the lapels of the heavy's coat in huge fists. He jerked the heavy up to his feet, and held him. The man winced and muttered oaths in pain. "My . . . my leg's killin' me."

Shayne shook him. "Give it to me straight, friend, or I'll break your other knee."

"Jake," the man gasped, standing on one leg, his ugly face contorted. "He's got a place next door to the gym. Most of the guys hang there, I'm there tonight, and Jake flags me into the backroom. He gives me a bill, tells me he's had a phone call from a friend named Fenster who needs a favor. This Fenster wants somebody to lay on you. Guess you was out to his pad this afternoon and he don't want you comin' back. I dunno. I didn't press. It ain't every day I get offered a bill.

So I look you up in the phone book and I'm here. That's the truth, Red, honest."

Shayne waltzed the limping man out the door and sent him stumbling down the corridor. He didn't wait to see if the guy fell on his nose or slammed into a wall. He stepped back into the apartment, slammed the door and stood with his back against it, breathing deep and taking in the room while his mind churned. He saw the .32 on the carpeting. He scooped it up and slid it into a table drawer. The room wasn't too scrambled. Cleaning up could wait until morning.

Shayne went into his bedroom and slid into the .45 rig, yanked on his coat and slammed on his hat. He suddenly was moving in this case after a long and frustratingly fruitless day. He had a ripple of reaction, someone striking out.

But he was puzzled by Fenster's play. Why send a heavy around just to lay on a few lumps? If Fenster's long range intent was to see Munroe's hide stretched in the sun to dry, if Fenster had the guts to acquire and put a human head in the U.S. Mail, hiring punk muscle blindly was contradictory.

But Fenster had to be pressed. Fenster's nerve ends had been jangled and he had

reacted; so Fenster should come up with a few explanations—even though it was two o'clock in the morning.

The house and surroundings were totally dark as Shayne rolled into the wide parking area at the top of the driveway. He punched out the headlights and sat for a few seconds, allowing his eyes to adjust to the night. Vacating the car, he surveyed the house and the yard without moving. The windows in the house remained black. There were lumpy shadows in the yard, the sound of a light breeze rippling through the palms. None of the dark shadows moved or changed shape and he was confident each bush-like shape had been planted.

Shayne went up to the front door and stuck his thumb against the buzzer. He kept pressure on the buzzer for a long time. No light came on inside the house. He scowled, tried the buzzer again. Nothing. He shuffled in impatience. Where was the maid, Tara?

He stepped back out toward the driveway, looked at all the windows across the front of the house. No light. His scowl deepened. But the absence of the maid could figure. The maid didn't sleep in. She was a daylight hours domestic, kept



at night only for special occasions.

Nor was no appearance by the blonde Francie Fenster surprising. She had been stoned on grass at four o'clock in the afternoon. By now she should be stretched out as if in a grave.

But where was Fenster? Had the mangled heavy got back to him by phone with a warning? Had Fenster packed a fast suitcase?

Shayne eased across the front of the house to the doors of a double garage. By standing on his tiptoes, he was able to press his nose against window glass. He cupped his eyes and searched hard. He saw two black lumps inside.

The cars didn't have to mean anything. Fenster could have called a cab.

The side yard tempted. There were no windows in this end of the house, but the yard opened into the pool area behind the house. He went to the back corner of the garage and stopped. All of the pool area was before him. The stars provided the only illumination and the lightest area was over the pool water. He knew the black lumps in the foreground and background were chairs and umbrellaed tables.

Suddenly he heard a splashing in the pool and he froze as a shadow surfaced and stroked away from him. The shadow touched the far end of the pool, came back, gliding smoothly through the water, touched the near end, then curved off toward corner steps.

He watched the shadow take the shape of a woman. She went to a table about halfway down the pool and folded into a chair. An instant later a match flared and a cigarette was touched. Shayne watched without moving. The cigarette glowed frequently in a quick rhythm. He made himself a sure bet: Francie Fenster was riding a roach.

Shayne left the corner of the garage and moved across the thick grass around the end of the swimming pool behind Francie Fenster. The night was quiet, his footsteps silent

against the sod. Francie Fenster didn't stir in the table chair; she continued to smoke with the reflexive rhythm. Shayne debated about calling out to her.

Then he saw another dark hump and he stopped in his tracks.

The hump was on the apron of the pool in front of Francie Fenster. It wasn't any particular shape. It looked like it could be anything covered with a tarp.

Instinct warned Mike Shayne. He continued to stand unmoving, staring hard, his breathing shallow, his heartbeat slightly faster. He opened his coat, gave himself free access to the .45. He needed light.

He looked around. The night shadows were deeper along the back of the house and that shadow was on the opposite side of the pool from where Francie Fenster sat and the hump loomed.

He eased back to the garage. Perhaps he could slide through the shadow against the house, find an outside switch to the pool lights near the door. He slid out of his shoes and stepped up on the apron. Across the pool, Francie Fenster continued to smoke.

Shayne moved cautiously until he was directly opposite the woman; he stopped. She

could pick up movement now, even inside the shadow, if she was seeing anything.

He saw the dark outline of the door ahead and went to it swiftly. A startled yelp from Francie Fenster would not have surprised him, but she remained silent as his hand found wall switches. He snapped both switches and light flooded the pool area. The underwater lights were slower gaining full strength.

Shayne was in a crouch and staring, his hand halfway to the .45. But nothing around him moved. Francie Fenster continued to sit cross-legged in the chair, purple bikini dark against her skin. She continued to smoke a cigarette.

Piled up on the apron in front of her was her husband, the body clad only in white knit swim trunks. Fenster was curled slightly and an arrow stuck up from his back.

The fully dressed maid floated face down in the water of the pool. Her body was in the far corner, the head bobbing where the gutters met. The arrow had penetrated Tara's side under her left arm.

Shayne bolted around the pool on stocking feet, moving in behind the calm Francie Fenster. The bow was beside her, propped between the chair and the table. The sheath of fresh arrows lay on the table.

Shayne eased around in front of the woman and got her first reaction. She smiled. "Hi."

The smile remained fixed, her eyes remained round, blank. The tip of the roach was burning her fingers but she didn't seem to notice.

"Welcome, stranger, to Francie's big day," she said. "I did it. I finally did it. Goddamn lover, he thought I was dumb. Silly little Cuban pussycat, she thought I was dumb. Now who's dumb? I ask you, stranger, who's dumb? Ain't gonna be no more lovin' in this house . . . not for a Cuban pussycat. It's Francie's big day! Got any grass on you?"

"No grass," Shayne said, keeping a sharp eye on Francie Fenster. "Is there some in the house?"

"Right on," she nodded.

He picked up the bow and sheath of arrows, making his moves casual. "I'll take these inside as long as I'm going."

Francie Fenster waved. "Speed back, lover."

Shayne collected his shoes and found the door to the house unlocked. He went inside and snapped on light switches until he found a telephone. He called the police and reported the double murder without giving his name. Then he went out the front door and got into his car and headed downtown.

Francie Fenster wasn't going to bolt. She'd had all night to move out. She'd killed hours before, probably in the early evening while there still had been daylight. Fenster was clad in his white swim trunks, the same trunks he had been wearing earlier, and there had been no lights on inside the house. Francie didn't need light; there was no distinction between light and dark in her world, only automatic movement and sense of direction. The cops would find her.

VIII

THE RINGING of Mike Shayne's telephone around eight-thirty the next morning roused the detective from deep slumber. He rolled groggily and yanked the receiver down to his ear, cupped it between shoulder and chin as he fumbled for the day's first cigarette.

Davey Ross Hathaway was on the line. "Shayne," he hissed, "Fenster is dead! I just heard on the radio!"

"I know," Shayne owlishly.

"Killed," Hathaway continued as if he hadn't heard the detective. "Murdered. They say his wife . . ." Hathaway cut off the words. Something had reached him. "You know he is dead? Hell, didn't I get you out of sleep? How could you . . ."

Shayne said nothing. He lit the cigarette, pulled smoke deep into his lungs gratefully. He heard Hathaway's quick breathing from the other end of the line.

Then Hathaway said softly. "The cops are saying the wife knocked over Fenster and the maid because of a little hanky-pank going on between the two, but I'm getting a different idea, Shayne."

"Yeah?" Shayne smoked, listened.

"You!" said Hathaway, the tempo of his words picking up. "You picked up something from Fenster that told you beyond doubt he was our boy. The wife is there, the crazy broad who is stonie from noon to bedtime, rain or shine, the grass addict, the bow and arrow freak. Ready to set up.

"Okay, you've got Fenster cold and the Blonde Bomb stoned. You plunk Fenster, hit the maid because she can be a witness, you lay it all on the bomber for the local cops. Neat, Shayne. I like that. You've got more cool than I figured. The Governor will be pleased."

"He should be," Shayne said flatly.

Hathaway chuckled suddenly. "You're mucho okay, Shayne. Sorry about not getting off on the right foot with you."

"Don't take the next flight to New Mexico, Davey." Shayne's voice was cold.

"Yeah?" Hathaway paused. When he spoke again he had turned distant. "Shayne," he said, "it's finished. I don't care how you got it done. I don't even care if laying it on the Reefer Kid doesn't hold up with the local cops. That's your problem. We're clear on this end. The next President of the United States doesn't know anyone named Mike Shayne, a Miami private eye. Why the hell would he?" Hathaway paused again. "Get the picture, man?"

"Problem, Hathaway," said Shayne. "Francie Fenster killed her husband and the maid."

"Okay, man, okay," said Hathaway. "It's your pitch, and you've probably got it set up good. No sweat. You don't get any curves from this end—even if we do know what really happened. Just stick with your story, Shayne: the wife did it. We don't care who did it as long as it is done."

"What if you're wrong, Davey?"

"I'm not."

"What if you tell Munroe he's free and clear and then he gets a slug plunked between his eyes? What if he's sprawled flat on his back and bleeding to death and he looks up at you

and says, "Davey, I thought you told me . . ."

"Cut it out, Shayne!" cried Hathaway.

"Think about it, Davey."

Shayne put the phone together and finished the cigarette without moving from the bed. Davey Ross Hathaway bothered him. Hathaway was a cruel man, quick to draw conclusions. He was ruthless and used people. He didn't like people, he used them, period. He was a con man.

Which meant his dossiers could be filled with pits of quicksand.

Shayne kicked off the top sheet and left the bed. He shook Davey Ross Hathaway out of his skull as he bulled into the Kitchenette and put on a pot of coffee. He was hungry, but, more important, he needed Jarvis and Vernon before they again disappeared for the day. He went to the telephone. It rang as he reached for the receiver.

He scowled. Hathaway again? He snapped the receiver up against his ear. "Shayne."

There was a moment's hesitation on the other end of the line, then: "One moment, please, Mr. Shayne. Mr. Cicerone wishes to speak to you."

Cicerone knew of Shayne's visit to his building; he had

heard about the detective's encounter with young Adrian. Cicerone was apologetic; such an encounter would not occur again. And now what was it Shayne had wanted? Could it be discussed on the telephone?

It could not.

"Then can I expect you at eleven o'clock?"

He could.

Shayne entered the highrise at five minutes before eleven o'clock. He had a full stomach and a fresh supply of energy. The mobster's call had detoured his effort to roust Jarvis and Vernon; he'd substituted the rousing-with breakfast. The two New Mexico men would come later.

He rode the elevator alone to the top floor where he was greeted by Fred Pinto who wore just the suggestion of a smile. Adrian, the kid, was not in sight. Pinto took Shayne to a polished door and opened it, then stepped aside.

Antonio Cicerone was a medium-statured man of late sixty years. He looked trim, composed, confident and congenial as he shook hands with Shayne. He was at home in the plush surroundings, comfortable in life. He might yet die a violent death—blood and brains streaming down the side of his emptied skull—but today he was the image of the well-to-do,

white-haired gentlemen found in liquor advertisements.

"Michael," he said.

"Antonio," grunted the redhead. He yanked his ear. "This can be brief."

"Excellent," Cicerone said with a genuine smile. "I do have a rather busy schedule today."

"Does it include a couple of jokers from New Mexico?" Shayne asked.

Cicerone showed mild surprise, then turned and walked to a panel of ceiling-to-floor windows. He stood looking out over the city for a few seconds before he faced the detective again. His smooth face remained blank, but his dark eyes were alive, curious.

"What about them?" he said.

"I hear they may be out to hit a guy."

Cicerone's cheek color brightened instantly, his mouth became a thin line and the dark eyes took on even more brilliance. But he didn't rattle. He took a few seconds to regroup inside and said:

"These two men are legitimate business friends, Shayne. I have negotiated with them in past years, I may again. They currently are interested in developing a new ski site in their state. I am discussing financing with them. Nothing else."

He paused, drew a long

breath, frowned. "What the hell are you talking about? What's this hit?"

Shayne already had his route planned. "Okay, Antonio," he said with a casual wave. He turned back to the door. "That's all I needed to know."

"Shayne!"

From the door, he looked at the mobster over his shoulder. Cicerone hadn't moved an inch. But now his jawline was tight, his lips compressed, and the dark eyes were little pinpoints of brilliant light.

"Tell me, Antonio," said Shayne, "you don't know about some poor bastard who had his head chopped off and put in the mail?"

"I don't!"

The denial reached Shayne as he closed the polished door behind him. He grunted to Fred Pinto and took the elevator to the lobby. He kept a sharp eye as he moved on the long strides toward the street door. He could be hustled back upstairs in a hurry if Cicerone had sent the word down:

Stop Shayne!

But no one made a move toward him and the detective went outside and plopped inside his Buick. He sat slouched and scowling against the brilliance of the day. He took a crushed cigarette package from his pocket, removed a bent cigarette,



jammed it into the corner of his mouth.

Shayne wondered what Cicerone was doing in this instant. If he was innocent, if his dealing with Jarvis and Vernon was strictly business, money matters, if he didn't know one damn thing about a plot to harass and eventually kill the

next President of the United States, then he still could be standing rooted and wondering if a redhead Miami private detective had gone off his rocker. On the other hand, if he was involved, he could be moving—and Antonio Civerone was a difficult man to forecast.

He could be on the phone, summoning Jarvis and Vernon. He could be on the phone, curtly terminating his association with the two New Mexico men. Or he could be sending a couple of heavies outside to lean on a private detective. Maybe Cicerone's reactions were slowing with age.

Shayne snorted against the third thought and sat a few inches lower in the car seat, eyes inventorying the sidewalk between his car and the highrise. No menacing objects approached.

Shayne smoked. He knew Cicerone. Cicerone wouldn't go to Jarvis and Vernon. They would be summoned; they would be *escorted* to the man if that became necessary.

The detective waited. And twenty minutes later he used the steering wheel to pull himself erect as a cab slid into the curbing in front of him. He vacated his car, hustled up to the sidewalk as two well-dressed men left the cab. One wore a Western hat.

"Jarvis?" the detective said.

The heavier of the two men reacted. He snapped a look at Shayne. He looked forty-five or so and had run to paunch. He had a receding hairline and large ears. He looked and acted like a man who never relaxed, probably carried a medicine cabinet of pills with him in his travels.

Vernon was probably twenty years older than Jarvis, a ramrod straight man with a good physical build, sideburns coming down from the hat. He looked like a soother, a man of quick calculation and little emotion. He probably was tonic for Jarvis.

It was Vernon who stepped toward Shayne. His manner told the detective that he was an aggressive man, busy, but in control, always in control—and curious, always curious.

"I'm Mike Shayne," said the detective. "I'm representing John J. Munroe."

Jarvis jerked but Vernon remained ramrod straight. Only his eyes changed. They narrowed. He stared hard at Shayne. "Your credentials."

Shayne flashed his identification. Vernon lifted one eyebrow. "A private detective?"

"Murder is my business, Vernon."

Jarvis jerked again, moved up beside his partner. Face

muscles danced, his fingers worked, he acted as if he might be standing barefooted on a hot wire. He grabbed Vernon's coat sleeve.

"Murder!" he exploded, his voice rising. "What is this, Vernon?"

"I'm not sure," the tall man said slowly, his eyes holding Shayne's. Then his voice became hard as he added, "If you accost either of us again, Mr. Shayne, you also will be talking to the police."

He turned toward the high-rise. "Come on, J.J."

Shayne watched them disappear inside the building. He yanked at his ear. The direct route always got results. He had jarred Jarvis, but Jarvis was a bundle of nerves. Vernon was the key, and Vernon was a tough nut. Instead of folding, bolting, denying, he had countered. It was an excellent tactic. It didn't tell a foe anything, and it kept him on the offensive.

The next round was Cicerone's.

Shayne returned to his Buick to wait. When he looked up, he saw a young man coming across the sidewalk from Cicerone's place. The young man arched, put his forearms on the open window on the passenger side.

"Mr. Cicerone says to convey

to you, Mr. Shayne," he said, "that he is at this moment terminating his association with Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Vernon. Mr. Cicerone also requests that any business you might have with these two gentlemen be conducted at another location. Mr. Cicerone says he is sure you will understand."

Shayne drove slowly toward the Glass Inn. Jarvis and Vernon would return there—eventually. But his thoughts at the moment were with Cicerone. Was the mobster tucking his head, telling Jarvis and Vernon to scram back to New Mexico, get lost in the mountains for a few months, forget they ever knew anyone named John J. Munroe? Was he saying, "We've been discovered, boys?"

Or had Cicerone been handed a pinless grenade by a detective's visit? Was he unaware of a plot to harass and kill a candidate for President of the United States? Was his business with Jarvis and Vernon straight?

More important: Were Jarvis and Vernon as dumbfounded as Cicerone?

After all, the plot could have died with Francie Fenster's arrow in her husband's back. Who would ever know?

Shayne became aware of the blue sedan behind him. He

wasn't sure where he had picked up the sedan, but it was on him tight now, following his turns. The driver, a man, was alone, but that was all he was able to distinguish despite repeated glances in his rear view mirror. The man could belong to Cicerone, of course. Cicerone could be making sure a detective was heeding a request.

Shayne braked at the curbing across the busy street from The Glass Inn. The blue sedan rolled up behind him, stopped. Shayne left the car and went back to the sedan.

Davey Ross Hathaway stared up at him from the driver's seat. "Okay, you're not a killer, Shayne," he said flatly. "I got to thinking after our telephone conversation this morning. The Reefer Kid knocked off her old man and the maid, like you say. But Fenster was just *one* suspect. Two still remain; Jarvis and Vernon. I came here to follow Jarvis and Vernon. I'm not sure why. I'm uptight. So I trailed them to you. I watched you brace them. They went inside, you went back to your car, a guy came over to talk to you and you left. So then I followed you."

Hathaway shrugged suddenly. It was an outward display of inner confusion.

"So I'm still uptight, confused. What's the scene? Where

do we go from here? Shayne . . . the Governor can't be killed! We have to protect him!"

"Davey," Shayne seethed, "get your—"

"Shayne?" A voice spoke behind the detective.

The redhead whirled. The braked dark sedan, motor idling, was immediately behind him. The driver was a huge black man. He was alone in the sedan, both hands on the steering wheel, hat tipped slightly to the back of his head.

His face remained blank as he said, "Gentry wants you. There's an All-Points out on you."

Shayne remained coiled, eyes holding the Negro's. Jeff Collier was one of the top men on Police Chief Will Gentry's staff; he had earned an assistant chief's role.

And Gentry never put out an All-Points on Shayne unless he was desperate—or angry.

"I was lucky, Mike," Jeff Collier explained. "I was driving by, spotted you. It happens that way sometimes."

"Jeff—"

"Drive your car in, Mike. I'll follow. We had a double slaying last night. The lady involved says you're a killer."

Shayne heard Davey Ross Hathaway suck a deep breath behind him. He whirled. "Stick,

Hathaway. Don't let either one of those birds fly."

IX

POLICE CHIEF Will Gentry was a burly man with grizzled eyebrows, blunt features and the sageness required to be a good cop. He and Shayne had been close friends for years; they had collaborated on many cases. But today Gentry was in a dark frame of mind. Shayne sensed the tension the instant he walked into the chief's private sanctuary.

Gentry sat low behind the cluttered desk, a large cigar stub stuck in a corner of his mouth. The grizzled eyebrows were down, shadowing the penetrating stare. He growled without moving, "I've got a little lady in the other room, Mike, who says you killed her husband and her maid. I know she's lying. I know she killed both with her bow and arrows. She confessed when she was brought in early this morning. She said, 'I killed them; they deserved to die; they made love under my nose.' I've got a tape, I've got latents, I've got a couple of other things. The lady killed them. I'm convinced.

"But there's just one damn problem, Mike! She was stoned on marijuana when she was brought in. And you know what

some smart shyster will do with that in the courtroom. Add: she's no longer high; she's sitting out there in the other room and now she's saying you did it. She's saying you came to her house yesterday afternoon, upset her husband for some reason she doesn't understand, and you returned later and killed the man. She doesn't know why you killed the maid. Or why you let her, the wife, live.

"Add: you weren't in your office all day yesterday; you haven't been in today. You had a gin date with Lucy Hamilton night before last and you didn't show. Lucy hasn't seen you since. Add—"

Gentry stopped talking suddenly. The cigar stub bobbed. "Naw, no more adds, Mike. You talk. What are you working on, and what's so secretive about this job you can't even confide in Lucy? Where do the Fensters fit?"

Shayne took time to light a cigarette. He stood silent for a moment, then blew smoke toward Gentry. He measured the police chief's stare. "Book me as a suspect, Will, or be patient. You can hold Francie Fenster for a few more hours."

Gentry jerked. "Book you?"

Shayne knew it was a crossroads for the chief. He had a murderer, yet he didn't have. He had expected a friend's help;

he wasn't getting it. Gentry could go hardnose or he could bend to years of mutual trust, tolerance and understanding.

His scowl deepened, the cigar stub tilted higher, a grating sound came from deep in his throat. Suddenly he stood and fired the cigar stub into a waste-paper basket.

"Twenty-four hours, Mike—and keep in mind I might not be able to hold the Fenster woman that long!"

"One more thing, Will. What's your fix on the time of Fenster's death?"

✓ "Take an hour either side of seven o'clock last night. Why?"

But Shayne was moving out. He didn't answer the chief. He loped out of headquarters building and drove back to the Glass Inn. Hathaway's blue sedan was not in sight. At the desk a clerk told the detective Mr. Jarvis had gone out and Mr. Vernon had checked out.

Did the clerk know where either had gone? The clerk did not know about Mr. Jarvis but Mr. Vernon was catching a flight to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Had Jarvis and Vernon left together? They had not. Mr. Vernon had checked out approximately thirty minutes earlier; Mr. Jarvis had gone out about five minutes before the detective had arrived at the desk.

Shayne returned to the

Buick. Which man had Hathaway followed? Was he at International, making sure Vernon was boarding a plane? Or had the sight of suitcases, the absence of Jarvis been an anchor? Was he, at this moment, trailing Jerome J. Jarvis through city streets?

Shayne grimaced. Will Gentry's twenty-four hour ultimatum weighed a ton. He hadn't gained an inch toward finding a potential killer. All he had was one suspect dead, another winging out of the city and a third on the move inside the city—God only knew where. And his lone hope of accomplishment at the moment seemed to be riding with Hathaway, a man he wasn't sure he could trust.

The thought deepened Shayne's scowl. He used his thumb and forefinger reflexively, sat rubbing his ear lobe. Hathaway could be taking things into his own hands again, trailing Jarvis. He was capable of the mental gymnastics that would eliminate Fenster and Vernon as suspects and leave him with Jarvis—just because Jarvis was the only one of the trio still walking the city. Hathaway could brood on that, figure Jarvis was going to hang around town for a month waiting for the convention, and then knock off the

odd's-on-favorite for the Presidency.

Hathaway could get out his little popgun derringer and plunk a bullet between Jarvis' eyes, just on that reasoning alone. Hathaway seemed to be a man who went blind when it came to the well-being of Monroe.

Shayne muttered an oath, pulled himself up in the car seat and got rid of the cigarette. His guts were tight. He felt handcuffed. This case hadn't gone right from its beginning. There was a feeling, a hunch, intuition. He had been hired to find a potential killer; the hiring—the *conditions* of the hiring—had been unconventional.

He had been given a man Friday; Hathaway had turned out to be a two-way man, maybe friend, maybe foe. He had been handed three major suspects; it was like choosing one out of three identical olives on a platter. And now one of the suspects was dead and the other two were scattering before he had a chance to get a line on either.

He cut out in the Buick. Before Jeff Collier had appeared to haul him down to police headquarters, Hathaway had shown signs of coming around. Maybe Hathaway had decided to play ball. If he had, and if he



currently was on Jarvis, he eventually might report.

Shayne drove to his apartment, called the Hotel Tanner, left a return call message for Hathaway, then fixed a cold meat sandwich, grabbed a new bag of potato chips and went to the deep chair near the phone, and sat back to await a phone call—that might never come.

Not if Hathaway decided to play God.

Shayne flipped on a radio, got music, then a newscast.

Shayne fidgeted. Sitting, not moving, was no good. Where was Hathaway and what was he doing? The potato chip bag was almost empty when the phone rang. Shayne swept it against his ear.

Davey Ross Hathaway said, "Hey, man, we must be on the same wave length; I wasn't sure I'd find you there. You

were able to handle things with the cops okay, I guess."

"No problem. Where have you been?"

"You didn't have to spill your guts about you-know-who and why you went out to the Fester place?"

"Nope," Shayne said. "Where'd Jarvis take you?"

"Jarvis?"

"From the cop shop I went back to The Glass Inn. A desk clerk told me Vernon had checked out and Jarvis had gone out. I figured you'd figure Vernon was heading back to New Mexico and you'd stick around to see what Jarvis was up to."

"So you figured wrong, Shayne. I saw Vernon and his suitcases and no Jarvis. I had about thirty seconds to calculate before Vernon was inside a cab and moving out. I decided to make damn sure Vernon was leaving the city. What the hell, if Jarvis was sticking, we always could pick him up again."

"And?" Shayne said sourly.

"It's why I called, man. Vernon didn't leave town. He rented an apartment. It's on Fleur Street, 609 Fleur, an old area of the city, probably the closest thing to a tenement district the city has."

"How do you know he rented?"

"He'd been inside about

twenty minutes and I was getting ready to cut when he came out and walked down the street to a corner wine shop. I took a chance. I went inside and told the manager I was looking for a man named Vernon. He said he didn't have a tenant by that name. I told him Vernon would have moved in during the last couple of days. He said the only new tenant he'd had in a month was a man named R.D. Sanford who had just taken a furnished place. Apartment 3-A, third floor. I got the hell out of there."

"Shayne, why has Vernon taken an apartment?"

"I'll be in touch, Davey," said the detective. He put the phone together and shot out of the chair."

X

THE BUILDING at 609 Fleur was weathered, a dull brown color. It was three stories high and had a cracked stucco front dotted with rusted window air conditioning units. Fleur normally would be a lethargic street, perhaps bustling for a few days after Social Security or Welfare checks arrived each month.

Today the street hummed with subdued curiosity and red lights flashing from the tops of police cars and a pair of am-

bulances. The activity was centered at 609.

Shayne was stopped at an entry to the building by a pair of uniformed policeman. "I know a guy who lives here," he protested. "What's going on?"

"Some kind of bomb went off inside," said one of the policemen. "A guy was killed. You can't go in, so how about moving back across the street, huh?"

Shayne looked over the cop's shoulder and saw an assistant medical examiner he knew. "Hey, Pierce."

Dr. Lanny Pierce came on out of the building, looking mildly surprised. "Shayne. What are you doing here?"

"Looking for a guy who took a place here just today. He's using the name Sanford."

"Yeah?" Pierce gave Shayne a sharp look. "Who is he?"

"Come on, Pierce," the redhead said flatly, "quit playing detective. It was Sanford's apartment that blew up?"

"Yep."

"Sanford get it?"

"Nope. It was the building manager, a guy named Rogers. The boys are piecing it together now."

"What have they got?"

"Odds and ends yet." Pierce shrugged. "But it looks like it's going to fit. This Sanford comes in early this afternoon, rents a

furnished place, then goes down the street. Rogers is in his first floor pad, drinking coffee with a friend named Bercy. When Rogers sees Sanford go out, he decides to go up to the apartment and check the air conditioner. According to Bercy, Rogers had been having trouble with the unit in that apartment. He'd had it repaired recently but he went up to double check. Then boom. Rogers is dead."

"The door exploded in his face?" Shayne said.

"The boys aren't sure," Pierce said. "They're leaning to the door buzzer. They think maybe a homemade bomb was hooked to the buzzer so that anyone punching it would get the blast."

"Seems odd a building manager would use a door buzzer if he knew his tenant was out, knew the apartment was empty." The redhead detective scowled.

"Bercy says his friend Rogers was like that, never entered an apartment without punching the door buzzer first, even if he knew the renter was out. Manager precaution, I guess. I suppose you might run into a secret bedfellow occasionally if you just went busting in."

"Un-huh," Shayne said, tugging his ear lobe. He watched the ambulance boys bring a

long, covered basket from the building.

"Mike," said Pierce, "there's a Sergeant Donohoo running this show. Maybe you'd better talk to him, tell him what you know about Sanford."

"Sanford has disappeared, eh?"

Pierce gave the detective another sharp look while lighting a cigarette. "I didn't say that, Mike. The guy isn't here, that's all I know."

"Did the apartment look lived in?"

"Nope, but then, hell, Sanford just rented a couple or three hours ago."

"Rented, rigged a bomb and vamoosed?"

"Mike, talk to Donohoo."

"You didn't notice a suitcase or two upstairs?"

"Nothing, Mike. Talk to Donohoo."

Shayne pounded down the sidewalk, got into his car and put Fleur Street behind him. He was deep in thought and he drove reflexively.

Vernon had rented an apartment and rigged a bomb for whom? Jarvis? Shayne slapped the steering wheel. Embezzling was not a new venture to Vernon, according to John J. Munroe. Was Vernon deep into Jarvis? Could it be that with the Cicerone deal suddenly caving in—assuming

that it had caved—Vernon found himself in danger of new discovery and that it had become a matter of survival? Had he rented, rigged and then phoned Jarvis, knowing damn well that Jarvis would be instantly curious about the apartment, go there and punch a door buzzer?

There was a flaw. The time element. The desk clerk at the Glass Inn had said Vernon had checked out about twenty-five minutes before Jarvis had gone out. And Davey Ross Hathaway had said he had followed Vernon. Hathaway hadn't said anything about stops along the way to the apartment.

So had the bomb come from one of Hathaway's suitcases? Hell; how many men ran around carrying readymade bombs? A gun, a knife, a strip of wire with which to garrot, yeah—but a bomb?

And a cab couldn't get from The Glass Inn to the Fleur Street address in less than twenty minutes, even in the dead of night with no traffic.

So something wasn't adding right.

Unless...

Shayne almost jerked the Buick into a parked car at the curbing with the fresh thought. He growled, eased off on the accelerator, cruised, his brow deeply furrowed as he fit

pieces. The pieces dropped into place beautifully. He slapped the steering wheel. Maybe he had it. On the one hand, the total picture wasn't right because a vital ingredient was missing, but on the other, the physical happenings of the last couple of days were explained.

If...

Two vital ingredients were missing.

He could trace one with Will Gentry's help. He drove to police headquarters. Gentry still was in a black frame of mind, but Gentry listened, and when Shayne had finished all the police chief said was, "Lord!"

Then he sent off to Washington for a couple of pedigrees. When they came in, Shayne and the chief studied them in silence. Finally, Gentry said, "It's your show, Mike. Do you want a backup or don't you?"

"I made a deal with the Governor of another State, Will. I don't think he—or the Florida politicos—would appreciate Miami police involvement. But thanks."

Gentry chomped on the cigar stub. "Yeah."

Shayne drove to the Hotel Tanner and found Davey Ross Hathaway in his suite. Hathaway looked mildly surprised, then ushered the detective inside with a sweep of his arm.

"What's the scene with Vernon and the apartment?" he wanted to know, taking up a position and tossing darts.

Across the room soft music came from a radio.

Shayne said bluntly, "Waiting for a newscast, Davey?"

Hathaway stopped the toss of a dart in mid-air, frowned at the redhead. "Again, man?"

"Waiting to hear about a bombing, a Miami detective who got blown to hell?"

Hathaway faced Shayne, his frown deepening. He stood with the dart caught in his fingertips. "I don't think we are tuned to the same wave lengths, man."

"All of it, Davey," Shayne said harshly, "the mailed threats, the harassment, the collection of information in the dossiers, your show. You want Munroe dead. I don't know why, but you want the man in his grave!"

Hathaway said nothing, merely stared.

"Past Munroe's associations and grievances plus the convention scheduled in Miami Beach, all click for you. Fenster—a Munroe enemy from long ago—lives here. Jarvis and Vernon—two more enemies—are in town, doing business here. You build your dossiers; they can be turned over to the cops, the FBI, after

Munroe is dead. They put Fester, Jarvis, Vernon on the hot seat as far as motive is concerned. You don't really care which one is tagged. All you want is Munroe dead and someone else to play the prime suspect.

"But then Munroe throws a curve. You lay the dossiers out for him and he decides to take the reins. You didn't expect that, did you, Davey? But Munroe is a strong man, and smart. He decides on a private investigation. He picks me. I suppose in the beginning you might've figured I was a run-of-the-mill private eye, maybe could be scared off. But you discovered in a hurry I'm not that kind. I loomed immediately as a definite threat to all of your plans.

"Then today you got a golden opportunity, Vernon leaving town and Jarvis sticking. It was your chance to get me out of the picture. You rent an apartment, rig a buzzer bomb—which you know how to do. I got your Army pedigree from Munroe. Washington verified it. You were classified a boobytrap expert while you were in the service. So you rig the buzzer, and you tell me Vernon has taken the place. You know I'll charge out there, punch the buzzer. Unfortunately, Davey, someone else punched it before I got there.

The building manager. He's dead."

Hathaway pitched the dart. Shayne dodged, but he felt a sudden, sharp pain in his shoulder. He glanced at the shoulder as he leaped aside. The dart was there. He pitched forward. Hathaway had snaked a hand into his jacket pocket. He brought the derringer into view.

Shayne caught Hathaway's wrist, twisted and slashed a knee upward in the same move. The knee doubled Hathaway with a howl of pain and the derringer flipped from his hand. Shayne slashed with a roundhouse left and followed with a right chop into Hathaway's middle.

Hathaway went down and groveled. Shayne dropped a knee into his stomach and caught the lapels of the jacket. He yanked Hathaway's head up.

He was conscious.

"Why?" he rasped: "There has to be a reason you want Munroe dead?"

"T-the . . . bastard . . ." Hathaway hissed.

Shayne's scowl was deep. The expletive had been raw, rasped with undisguised hate. Shayne didn't understand. Where was the loyalty, the love for a man who had befriended long ago?

Unless . . .

THE SWITCHBOARD operator in Santa Fe was polite but would not put Shayne's call through—until he became a name-dropper. He said the call was from Mike Shayne in Miami, Florida, who was telephoning on behalf of Davey Ross Hathaway.

The operator began moving plugs and within twenty-five minutes John J. Munroe returned the call to Miami police headquarters.

"Yes, Shayne?"

"I've got him, sir."

"You were to call Bubba—"

"I never go the curve when there's a straight shot. I've got Davey Ross Hathaway for you."

There was a long pause on the other end of the line, then John J. Munroe said wearily, "I was afraid of that, Shayne. I'm scheduled to go to my ranch within the hour, but I'll be in Miami tomorrow. Will you be dining at the Golden Cock?"

"I'm due for a good meal, yeah," said Shayne.

The next night, at the Golden Cock, John Munroe swung a booted ankle on a Levied knee and fingered the shot glass on the table in front of him. He was somber; a deep frown creased his brow.

"Things go okay in Maine?" Shayne asked.

Munroe looked up, his face registering surprise. The blue

eyes penetrated as if searching for something invisible before he said flatly, "We got the job done, yes. It looks good for the National convention."

He left it hanging. Shayne said, "You always get the job done, don't you, Governor?"

Munroe's frown deepened. "We like to think we do," he said carefully.

Shayne stared into the glass of cognac as he swirled it in his huge hand.

"Most things are obtainable, Shayne," the future President went on, still careful, mildly curious now. "The problem, of course, is determining how they are to be obtained."

"A little twist here, a little twist there?" Shayne said, abruptly matching the stare of the blue eyes.

Munroe sat like a statue for several seconds before shrugging slightly. "Levers make the wheels go round," he said. "But let's talk about Davey Ross. It is the will, of course. I do not have family, but I have wealth. And under the terms of my will everything I have accumulated as Governor, and all I will accumulate as the President of the United States is to be returned to the people of this nation; my personal holdings in New Mexico go to Davey Ross."

"What do you have on him, Governor?" Shayne asked in a

tone that was harsh on the edges. "What was your lever with Davey Ross?"

Munroe tensed. The coyote in him had surfaced.

"The dossiers," said Shayne. "A little twist here, a little twist there. I suspect, Governor, it's how you live. Even in my case you twisted. You had me scoped, you found out what kind of a man I am, what intrigues me, what makes me move, then you used the information."

Munroe sagged slightly. "Hmm." He paused, sipped scotch, then said, "All right, I'm going to level with you. It can't damage anyone anymore. A long time ago, Shayne, Davey Ross killed a girl. It was at the university. It was an accident with a gun, but it easily could have been—*might* have been—made to look like murder.

"Davey Ross panicked. He took her body out into the foothills and buried it. The girl's disappearance finally was passed off as a run-away, she was just one of the kids who disappear. The only problem for Davey Ross was, he couldn't live alone with the act. He had to confide in someone, and he finally confided in me."

"Giving you the lever."

Munroe tightened. "Months had passed since the girl's

death. Everything was quiet. What good could come of producing a skeleton? None for her family; they already had licked the wound and the wound was healing. And certainly none for Davey Ross; the girl was gone, buried—and her death had really been an accident."

"So you had your lever," pressed Shayne. "And you've been using Davey Ross since."

Munroe's brows came down. His look bordered on being a glower. "I've needed him—and he has been handsomely compensated," he said in a voice barely audible.

"Un-huh." Shayne swirled the cognac again, put it aside. He stood, looked Munroe straight in the eye. "Well, I suppose some men resign themselves to living under a thumb, adjust to it," he said. "But others do not. Sooner or later, they strike back. And that's your Davey Ross Hathaway, Munroe. In a way, I feel sorry for him."

"He's a killer, Shayne!"

Shayne arched a shaggy brow, zoomed in on Munroe. "A moment ago he was the unfortunate trigger man in an accidental shooting." The detective snorted, leaned over the table. "Dépends on whom, I guess."

"But he can't touch me, Shayne! No one can touch me! Not now! I'm going to be the President of the United States!"

Shayne stood back. He was on the brink of erupting. The temptation to smash a fist into the face of John J. Munroe was almost too much. He steeled himself.

"Power," he breathed. Then to the Governor, he said: "I think not. I think you're going to withdraw from the race. Before the convention. Otherwise, the opposition is going to get some very interesting information from certain underworld sources—like Cicerone, maybe, or some of his other boys I know."

"You have no proof," Munroe said quickly, sitting stiffly upright. "You can't do this to me, Shayne. I... I'll..."

"What?" Mike Shayne snorted. "Sue me? Send a pack after me? Not likely. And the opposition is very clever. Do you think they need proof to smear you in the press? No, you know they don't. Just enough information to get the newshounds digging. I suggest you just announce that you're withdrawing, that you're through here and in New Mexico when your term runs out.

Say it's because of your discovery of Hathaway's treachery. Use any excuse you want. But get out of politics."

The Governor's face was white. "What... what are you getting out of this Shayne? If it's money, I'll double it. What do you want?"

"Want?" Shayne's disgust showed plainly in his rugged face. "Not a thing. Just to get you out of the picture is enough. This country has had enough between Watergate and Chappaquiddick. They don't need a New Mexico version of corruption."

"I'll deny this, Shayne! I'll fight you!"

Munroe was panting.

"You do that, Governor. You just do that. It'll look great in the papers. Either way, Munroe, you're defeated. You just take your choice. Publicly or privately. It's up to you."

The redhead turned then, and left the lounge. As he went through the door to the street, a sudden breeze of fresh air blew in from the ocean. Mike Shayne breathed a sigh of relief. The air smelled good here.



THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every issue!

A NEW EXCITING NOVELET

DEADLY **by**
LITTLE **GIL**
GREEN EYES **BREWER**

THE CIGAR BUTTS tore it. A lot of things had gone wrong before that. Previously I'd smelled cigar smoke in the house. Carol said the delivery boy smoked cigars. Also, two men soliciting contributions for the church had stopped in. Sure, okay. Did that account for twelve butts? As well as one lying warm on an ash-tray? And who ate that steak?

"Why, Tommy! It is peculiar, isn't it?"

Carol stared past my shoulder. Dressed in a green playsuit, with long, curved legs below her shorts. There were plenty of other lush contours, too. Shoulder-length hair like burnished brass, lips like wet rubies.

I shoved the tin box with the twelve butts, assorted sizes, under her turned-up nose. "In the phone stand drawer!" I snapped. "I smoke a pipe, don't I, baby? Since when have you turned Indian?"

Carol sounded weary. She peered into the box. Her nose wrinkled. "Maybe Doc Fontell?"

"Fontell doesn't smoke," I told her quietly. "He's a lush. I suppose Fontell ate that steak, too? What the hell's this place coming to?"

"I fed the steak to a dog. He was lost. His ribs showed." Her voice was getting edgy.

"Damn it!" I hurled the box of butts across the room. They banged onto the living room couch. Some dusted the wall.

The warning seemed meaningless, but the warning wasn't what counted. What mattered was the fact that it came from his wife. His wife, who was supposed to be dead!



Two spilled into the gold-fish bowl. "How in blazes you expect me to work? I lock myself in that shack five-hundred yards from this house—trying to paint—while you carry on a love affair under my nose. And with your cousin Ella lying upstairs with a broken leg. Anybody'd think you were a sex-starved brat!"

"Thomas! Will you stop it! Doctor Fontell is upstairs with Ella. D'you want him to know everything that goes on?"

"I don't care who knows what. I'm getting out."

"Go ahead if you feel that way. Maybe we do need a vacation. Maybe I'm getting a little sick of your cheap suspicions."

"I will! You can keep your silent lover."

Her voice was tired, not even angry. "Good by, Thomas."

"Good by!" I hurled at her.

Turning, I strode out of the living room, into the hall. Doc Fontell—Millard Fontell—was coming down the low staircase. Erect, haughty, dressed in a white linen suit, his graying mustache neatly clipped, he blinked at me from behind his glasses.

"Well," I shouted. "Did you hear it all? How's your blasted patient?"

"Why, Thomas—I don't think—" he stopped.

I went on out the front door,

cut across the bay-front lawn toward the copse of slash pine, beyond which was my work-shack.

I knew Carol was back there crying. Probably bawling on Fontell's padded shoulder. I'd had enough. I was fed up.

Probably every neighbor in the vicinity had heard everything just now.

I flung the door open, in my shack, slammed it shut. The canvas I'd been working on stank. I kicked it across the room. Paint smeared across the Navajo rug on my cot.

There were three quarts of whisky left in the case. I tore one open and began. The excitement did it. The excitement always did it. Those three bottles had been in that case from my last binge over a year ago.

I took two long swallows. "Here I go again. Up and over."

I took another snort, slumped onto the cot. The room was a mess. Paintings were stacked against the four walls. A floor littered with brushes, bulging paint tubes. I'd lost two magazine contracts because of this. And *Prinwell's Prime Soups* had taken a vote that said I was slipping. They'd turned their advertising artwork over to another guy.

Fine. Dandy. Great. I lit a cigarette, kept working on the bottle. It reached my head

quickly. I hadn't drunk in a long time. *Thomas Cowan*, I mused sullenly, *you're going to get maggoty.*

My wind was up, like Doc Fontell—the bleary-eyed failure, caught between the old school and the new. Old Doc Fontell lived right next door. He could take care of Ella Gordon, with her leg in splints. She shouldn't have come down here for vacation. Shouldn't have tried to build a rose trellis. Shouldn't have fallen. Damn her, anyway.

I kept tapping the bottle. The thoughts flowed.

Why had Carol lied? Over a year of married life. Real happiness, too. Until now. I'd suspected before. Seen traces. But never lasting for weeks.

Who in hell could he be? An elusive devil. Probably handsome, too.

I stomped out the cigarette, lit my pipe. I had another long drink from the bottle.

We hadn't had much to begin with. My painting while Carol worked as a nurse. Our two room village flat in New York. Then Carol got the inheritance, when her grandfather died. We came to Florida. Bought the big, two-storied, sprawling place we had now on Tampa Bay.

I thought of Carol as I'd always known her. Sweet, lov-

able, truthful, kind. I knew I'd always love her. There must be some explanation. *Don't be a fool, Cowan. You know when you're licked.*

Half the bottle was gone. The pipe fell from my fingers. Getting up, I lurched over to the battered bureau. I used the top as a palette. In the first drawer was my loaded snub-nosed .32 revolver. I'd take that with me. I laid it on top of the bureau.

You get nasty when you're drunk, Tom. Out of your head. You frighten me. No telling what you might do.

Rough and rugged. That's me. Just the same, I tossed the gun back into the drawer. Slammed the drawer shut. I went back to the cot and drank some more.

Suddenly I knew I was plastered. Time fled. The bottle was empty. The windows were dark. Carol...

I did love her. One more drink. Open a new bottle. Then go see her.

Talk with her.

Maybe I'd done something. We'd loved each other too well, too long, to allow something like this.

I shoved myself off the cot, and took two steps. I clawed the air, sprawled toward the case of whisky. My hand closed over a bottle...

II

I WAS LYING in mud. I could smell the choking odor of sulphur, dead fish. Twisting in the ooze, I stared through the pale darkness. Tampa Bay. Sprawling back, I pressed my hands to my throbbing head, looked straight up at the first pink-gray feelers of dawn, wondering where I was, how I'd got here.

Carol... The argument. Remembering seemed to increase the pain in my head. The drinking. Then what?

I shoved myself to my knees. My ribs ached. I felt sick, dizzy, shot. I was covered with mud and slime from head to foot.

The thickness was leaving my head. I didn't want to remember. I couldn't remember. Time was a black splash of paint across the rainbow of trouble.

Somebody shouted: "That's it!" Footsteps pounded hollowly on wood nearly overhead.

I lurched erect. I was standing beneath a jutting pier, close to barnacled pilings. The tide was out. Dawn struck a match, the day brightened.

I glanced quickly behind me. The bay waterline was close. Another hour and I'd have drowned in my sleep.

Men talked loudly above me, on the pier. I stepped in close to a piling. Somebody said, "Dead

all right. Stiff. Shot through the neck and abdomen. Recognize him, Cap'n?"

Another voice said quietly, "Damned if that pug-nosed face isn't familiar. But I can't place it."

"Have to send out a tracer."

"Yeah."

"Shall I call the M. E.?"

The quiet voice said, "Yeah. I'll bet this hooks in with that Ford convertible was brought in from out there on the street around four."

I clung to the piling. Jagged knife-edged barnacles and oyster-growth sliced my hand. I watched blood trickle down my wrist. I didn't move. I tried frantically to remember. Something. Anything.

"...bullet hole in the dashboard," a man said.

"Run out to the car, White. Call in for the M. E.. Yeah," the quiet one said. "Bullet hole. Blood, too."

"You run a check on the car?"

"Yeah. It's beginning to add up a bit. Only this isn't the owner of the car. His name was Cowan. His wife's missing, too. Jesus, this is some mess. The neighbors said this Cowan was raving yesterday afternoon."

The voices reached me. It was like a police drama on the radio in another room. I was connected with this. Carol was

missing? Who in God's name was that up there, dead?

I didn't mean to jump. If I hadn't been so weak, so tense, I might not have. A long-legged, hairy spider crawled off the piling onto my arm. I jumped.

I'd been in one position. My feet had sunk ankle-deep into the muck. The jump threw me off balance. I flailed with my hands, missed the piling, and sprawled with a mushy slap into the slop.

The voices ceased. Feet pounded. Scraped.

I twisted frantically. Got to my knees.

"Cripes a'mighty, Cap'n! It's another—he's alive."

I thrashed to my feet. My feet sank as I tried to run. I sprawled to my knees again.

The quiet voice, faintly disturbed now, said, "All right, down there! Stay put. Don't move—don't move at all!"

I stared at the mud. Swung my head from side to side. Cursed. What was happening? My thoughts were like mush.

Keep your silent lover... Good by, Thomas.

Feet stomped near. A hand grasped my shirt collar, yanked me up. Three uniformed cops stood around me. Brighter morning revealed shiny boots coated with muck.

A burly, red-faced man with clear blue eyes, dressed in a



plain gray suit, let go of my shirt.

"Search him," the man said quietly.

One of the cops went over me. A young one, with the rough belligerance of a new officer. "What a stinking mess." Then he paused. Reached into my pocket. Brought out a snubnosed revolver. My revolver! "Here we are, Cap'n."

"Yeah," the man in plain clothes said. He took the gun. His eyes lidded as he watched me. "I'm Captain Larker. White just searched you. They're Allan, and Furness. I'm from homicide."

I shook my head, tried to

mumble something about the gun.

Larker grimaced. "Three spent cartridges. One to go." He kept watching me. "What's the matter? Lose your nerve?"

"What?"

"What's your name?"

"I don't see—" I hesitated. "Tom Cowan."

Larker motioned with the gun. "C'mon. Let's get out of this stink-hole."

White gripped my arm. I stumbled along. Up beside the pier to the dry, sandy beach. Through sand-spur-clotted grass. Around to the pier entrance.

I yanked at the cop's grip, turned on Larker. "I've got a right to know what's up, Captain. Honest, I don't know how I got here."

"Stow it," Larker said. He wore no hat. His hair was black, shot with streaked gray. He nodded toward the pier end.

We approached a huddled figure. I stared at it. It didn't seem real. I was frightened. I knew they were trying to scare me into saying something. All right. I knew nothing to say. Nothing. Period.

I'd never seen the dead man. Slight of build, in new blue jeans and an old army field-jacket, his boyish-looking, freckled face seemed peaceful. His right side was soaked with

dried blood. There was a small hole in his throat.

"Hold out your hands, Cowan."

I turned toward Larker. Bright steel snicked around my wrists. Something inside me went dead.

"I never saw that man before!"

"Sure, sure. You had a fast night, didn't you, Cowan? I figure you tried to push this guy off the pier into the water after you shot him. Only you were so crocked you fell off yourself. A pity the tide was out."

"I... couldn't... have—I couldn't—"

"Turn it off," he said softly. He reached with one foot, and snicked the tail of the dead man's field jacket. It exposed a nearly empty bottle of whisky. The brand I'd been drinking. "One last drink for strength was too much, eh, Cowan? I found the other two empties in your work room."

"What?" Almost three bottles of whisky? Impossible. I told him so.

"Sure. Ella Gordon says you were a case." He paused, then said, "All right, Cowan. Where'd you put your wife's body?"

I was plenty weak. My knees caved. Carol, dead? He must have seen the expression on my face.

"You act and paint, too? Come on, Cowan. Get it over with. I know all about you. I've been out to your house since a little after four. Two sets of neighbors claim you threatened your wife yesterday. You got blind, wild drunk."

"You're crazy!"

He shoved his face close to mine. I saw the tiny veins in his eyes. His voice was flat. "We don't care why a man kills. We find out. But if he kills, he gets burned, see? He always gets burned." He paused. His breath rushed between thin, partly-smiling lips. "Was that your wife's lover? You killed them both. You killed your wife, Cowan. Where'd you put her body?"

I brought the cuffs up sharply. Intended to slice his throat. His hand grabbed. He twisted the metal binding chain. The steel cut into my wrists.

"I'm not going to fool with you," he said quietly. "Your car was picked up by a cruiser. There was blood in it. Specimens are at the lab, right now. A bullet hole. Later, somebody phoned in, said they saw a man carrying something out onto the pier. Staggering all over. Dead drunk."

I heard one of the uniformed cops refer to me. "Look at the guy's eyes. Cripes. Crazy, like!"

"It isn't so," I told Larker. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure, you do," Larker said quietly. "You'll have to tell it to somebody sooner or later. Why not me? Two years ago you were a starving artist. Flat broke living in Greenwich Village, New York. You met a nurse, Carol Standish. You married her. A month later she inherited over a hundred thousand dollars. Quite a coincidence, eh? You knew her grandfather was ready to croak. You've been eating high on the hog for over a year. But your wife was troubled because of your drinking. You didn't want to lose out. You saw your chance, in a drunken rage. You killed them both!"

"You're a liar!"

Larker stared straight at me. His voice was flat. "Quit stalling, Cowan. Where did you put your wife's body?"

III

IT WAS LATE afternoon. There was a slight wind off Tampa Bay. I stared at the back of Captain Larker's head in the front seat of the police car, as we drove along Bayside. White was beside me. Another cop drove. We were headed toward my home. Royal palms flashed by, their tall trunks red-tinged

from the failing sun. Out the side window of the car, the bay was placid, remote.

I'd been examined, questioned, fingerprinted. Questioned till I thought I'd go mad. The slugs that killed the man were from my gun. The blood in my car was Type A. The dead man's type.

According to Larker, the fun was only starting since I wouldn't talk.

"You got one thing in your favor, Cowan," he tossed back at me as we took the long gravel drive toward my home. "I still can't see how you could drink nearly three bottles of whisky in that time."

"Thanks," I said.

"Don't mention it."

The police had kept it quiet. The afternoon edition of the *Herald* ran a small story. But reporters, photographers, and plain sight-seers were at the house *en masse*, now. They prowled the grounds, gesticulating, gabbling, as the car slid to a halt. Men crossed the drive toward the car.

Snatches of conversation reached me. A man hurrying toward the bay frontage with a camera in his hand said, "Wish I could get a shot of her body. Wonder where he stuck her?"

I tried to close my mind to it. But that didn't help. Three men

in plain clothes surrounded the car, questioning Captain Larker.

"Larker! Somebody was living in an old store-room on the second floor."

"What?"

I felt the blood rush to my head. Had she really done this to me?

"Yeah," the man said. He sounded breathless. "Old room. The gal with the busted leg says nobody ever went near it. There was a man there, all right. Clothes, food—a half-eaten steak and case of beer. He was living high."

Larker was already out of the car. "Anything to go on?" he asked.

The man shrugged; a thin, gray-faced fellow, with eyes like a Pekingese dog. "The guy was a sailor. That we know. Everything about his clothes was sea-going. C'mon. Have a look for yourself."

"Yeah." Larker turned, flicked the rear door open, motioned to me. "Okay. Cowan."

I had to make two tries getting out because my hands were still cuffed. "Why don't you take these off?" I said to Larker. "I won't run away."

He ignored me. Two cops stuck behind us. We walked toward the front porch of my house.

A woman in a straw hat pointed, said, "There he goes."

"A foxy killer," her husband admitted.

In the house, we headed for the stairs. The fellow with the Pekingese eyes led the way. Somebody called my name from the living room. It was Doc Fontell.

"Thomas," he said. "I'm glad to see you home."

"Take a good look," I told him, raising my cuffs. "I won't be here long."

He stood there, hemmed and hawed a moment at Larker, his mustache bristling beneath the inquisitive glint of his glasses. Finally he decided it was best to speak to me while he had the chance.

"It's Ella," he said. "I think you should go in and talk with her."

I smelled applejack. He was well-primed. The old fool was a good doctor. Somewhere he'd missed the boat. The story went, he'd had an excellent practice in Mississippi, and drunk himself out of it. Taken his few dollars, bought the place next door to us. He got along.

"Why?" I said. Larker breathed hard at my elbow.

"Ella fell out of bed last night during the—er, excitement. Fractured her leg again. I had to put it in a cast. Splints

weren't enough." He touched my arm. "Tom, I had to tell them—," he nodded toward Larker,—"what I knew. I'm immensely sorry."

"It's all right, Doc. Did you see me come back to the house last night after I had that argument?"

Fontell's lips clamped tight. He nodded. "Yes, Tom. I'm afraid I did. Tried to get you to go back to your workroom and sleep it off." He started to smile, wiped it off.

Larker tugged my arm. We went upstairs.

Ella's room looked like a hospital ward. She'd been crying. Never pretty, her mouse-colored hair was scraggled. She peered tensely up from the bed, said, "Tommy! Tommy, what have you done?"

Larker gave me a shove toward the bed. I tried to hide the handcuffs from Ella. It only made them more obvious. She stared.

"Look," Ella said. She flipped the covers on the bed back. Her right leg was in a cast from ankle to hip. "I heard the gun," she sobbed. "I tried to get out of bed to help. Oh, Tommy, how could you!"

"Damn it. How could I what?"

"You've done something horrible!"

I'd never much liked her.

This didn't help. I caught Larker's bemused grimace.

"Listen, Ella. I don't know what happened. I passed out in the shack. It's a blank, from then on. But if I did any of these things I'm supposed to have done, I'd remember. I know I'd remember."

She was sobbing so hard she couldn't speak.

I whirled. Larker and I left the room. We were joined in the hall by two cops. The man with the dog's eyes gestured from the end of the hall.

I HADN'T been in the storeroom since the day we moved into the house. The entrance was in an alcove below the attic stairs. A crate of blankets had stood before the door.

When I saw two neighbors come from the room, accompanied by another policeman, it got me. This was our home. Carol's and mine. It was being turned into a side-show.

I told Larker what I thought. He shrugged. "Routine."

The neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Addis. Cline Addis had owned this house. We'd bought it from him. His wife turned briskly and walked away, muttering.

Addis glanced at me. His round, pale face was scornful. "I knew something would happen. I wish to God I'd never

sold you this place, Cowan." He turned to Larker. "You know what I think, Captain?"

Larker shook his head patiently. His fingers bit into my arm. For some reason it cheered me.

"Captain," Addis said thickly. "I knew Cowan's wife. She wasn't the kind to carry on with another man. And not—" he gestured toward the store-room, "in this fashion. I'm good at puzzles. I've been thinking it over. I bet Cowan hid the man here. Promised him money. So it would look right. Then he killed him. Can't a husband kill his wife's lover and get away with it?"

"There are circumstances," Larker said. "But you've overlooked the fact of Carol Cowan's disappearance."

Addis' pig-eyes lighted. "She knew! She found out! He had to kill her. She'd talk."

"A man's wife can't testify against him."

I turned, entered the store-room. Cline Addis tried to hang on to Larker. Larker broke away, followed me.

The first thing I saw was the purple tie. It hung from a naked light bulb in the center of the room. Attached to the small chain-switch, it acted as a cord. A pea-jacket hung on the wall. An old army cot acted as a bed. The vanished steak

lay half-eaten on a grease-mottled plate.

"Pretty, eh?" Larker said, as I heard the phone ringing. He turned to the cop, White, who'd stuck with us all day as a volunteer. "Get that, will you?"

I said, "You can pick it up on the extension in Ella's room."

White hurried off. I turned to Larker. He lowered his gaze.

The gray-faced fellow with the big eyes was jubilant. "Cowan," he said. "You shouldn't've done it. But by God, she must've been a hell-er!"

I lunged forward. Larker grabbed my arm.

"Damn you!" I blurted. "Carol didn't do this. She could never do this!"

"Maybe the old fellow was right," Larker said, referring to Cline Addis.

White came back into the room, his young face pale with determination. I hated his damned attitude. Trying to impress Larker.

"The paraffin test on Cowan's hand. The lab reports it positive, Cap'n."

Larker nodded. He shook his head at me. His voice was very quiet. "It's stacking against you all the time, Cowan. Why don't you confess? It'd save a heap of trouble." He talked as if we were having coffee together, discussing the weather.



"I can't confess to something I didn't do," I said.

Larker shrugged. "Yeah. Okay." He glanced at the other man. "Find anything else, Wolvern?"

Wolvvern's eyes narrowed. He picked up a sheet of paper from the top of a battered dresser I remembered moving in here when we took the house. "Some names on this paper, here," he said. "Don't make anything of it, though. Not another speck of identification in the room. I figure Cowan did away with everything."

Larker took the paper. I glanced over his shoulder.

There was a list of men's names. *Bromlick. T. Burroughs. Hennicutt. Montague. J. P. Fr. Tilson. D. Pendegast.* There was a check mark after the name *Fr. Tilson*. It was underlined.

Fromme. Blocker. Crodnult. Those three were crossed out. Larker snapped his fingers. "Fences! That's what they are. I recognize three of them. One in Tampa. One in Atlanta—*Blocker*. And one was picked up in New York on a jewel haul last month. It's a lead." He turned to me. "Cowan. Did you write this?"

"My God, no."

"Sure way to find out," Wolvern said. He reached in his pocket, brought out a pencil stub. The list was made in pencil. "Come here, Cowan." He placed paper, also from his pocket, on top of the paint-scaled dresser. Handed me the pencil. "Start writing."

Larker grunted, "Yeah." Wolvern and he discussed the names on the list. I started to write. Anything. I tried to think. My gaze dropped. I stiffened at sight of the open top drawer in the dresser.

In the outer edge, jammed nearly out of sight into the crack where the wood joined, was a square of cardboard.

I glanced over my shoulder. "What should I write?"

"Do the names you remember from this list," Larker said. "Then write the Twenty-third Psalm." He chuckled, turned back to Wolvern. Downstairs I heard men talking.

I managed to get my left hand into the drawer. With just enough cuff-chain left to write with my other hand.

It wasn't cardboard. It was a snapshot. Hastily searching the room, they'd overlooked it. I glanced once at it quickly. Shoved it inside my muddied shirt.

I went back to writing. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He leadeth me beside the still water. He . . ."

The snapshot had been that of a very young man. He was standing in front of a house. There was a large porch. In plain sight, on the side of the porch, was a porch swing. The man in the picture was the dead man they'd found on the pier. But something else got me.

I had a funny feeling I'd seen that place before. Like in a dream. Someplace in the back of my mind was an answer. But I couldn't remember. Just a tickler.

"All right," Larker said. "Let's have a look. We're not specialists. But I took a course—" He paused, stared at the paper. "Nah!"

Wolvern said, "Nope. Altogether different. Say," he said, turning to me. "Don't you even know the Twenty-third psalm? You got it all backwards here."

"Yeah," Larker agreed. "We'll excuse it this time. Cowan's got plenty on his mind. We'll have this handwriting checked."

My eyes rested on a dirty white sailor's sea-bag, tied to the foot of the cot. I kicked it with my toe, saw the faded, nearly washed-out letters: *S. S. S. S.*

S. S. what?

"C'mon," Larker said. I kicked the bag again. It swung around. *San Miguel*. The *S. S. San Miguel*. Turning quickly, I went after Larker. He attached no importance to my actions.

We filed from the room. Larker yanked the purple tie. The light went out. We walked down the hall. At Ella's door, Doc Fontell placed a finger to his lips, said, "Shhhhh! She's sleeping."

Halfway downstairs, the phone rang. White, who was ahead of us, said, "I'll get it, Cap'n," and raced buoyantly for the phone in the hall.

Larker and Wolvern led me beside the phone stand. I remembered the cigar butts, as White talked.

Hanging up, he turned. "Cap'n. A phone call came into

headquarters. Some woman. Claims she found a woman's handbag and clothes. Handbag had Carol Cowan's name in it. Out on Route 5. Near a swamp by the canal. At the exact junc-ture of the canal and the highway."

"Did they get the woman's name?" Larker's voice showed slight excitement. Something for him.

"She hung up before they could. Couldn't trace the call, either."

"What kind of clothes?"

"A green play-suit."

Larker turned to me. "What clothes was your wife wearing when you claim you last saw her?"

I choked, barely got it out. "A—green play-suit."

Larker's voice was quiet again, almost sad. "That ties it. So you ditched her out there, eh, Cowan? A night in the swamps. Okay, let's go."

IV

DARK MOON. A purple tie. A young man's snapshot. A porch. A porch swing. *S. S. San Miguel*. A dead man. The dark rush of night walled against a white ribbon of highway. How did they fit? Why had they been made to fit?

I slumped in the rear seat. Beside White and Wolvern. The

driver was the same one who'd brought us to my home, a red-faced sergeant. Captain Larker sat beside him. Larker hummed to the baritone song of fast tires on cement.

Had I done these things? I told myself that it was impossible. But I remembered the vehement devilishness of John Barleycorn.

Larker's voice came quietly back to me from the front seat. "Well, Cowan. Bet you didn't think you'd be traveling this road again so soon, eh? It was only last night—"

"I didn't. You're way off, Larker. If you'd listen to me, maybe you'd get someplace. That's the trouble with you guys. No telling what's happened."

"Sure, sure! You'd like us to quit, wouldn't you? How come you forgot her clothes? Why'd you leave them in plain sight along the road?"

I didn't reply.

"Answer the Captain," White said.

"Quit bucking so hard," I told him. "Larker knows you're along." I felt White stir. I could almost see his face grow red.

What could have happened to Carol? Maybe the dead man had done something to her. Maybe I'd caught him, killed him because of it.

There was no tangible lead

for me. Only the circumstances piling up against me steadily. Tonight they'd slap me in jail and leave me there. Until they'd cooked up a good enough case. Then they'd hold a trial.

This kind of circumstantial evidence could send a man to the chair.

"This is about it, Cap," the driver said. "Can't see the canal. Mangroves shield it."

"God, what a night. It's black as a rain-barrel at midnight."

"Nice night for a murder," Wolvern said.

As the car drew to a halt, Larker leaned back. "You're fancy as all hell, Cowan," he said. "You dreamed up a terrific bit of business. But it's like the centipede with a hundred legs. He's all right till he becomes conscious of them. Then he falls all over himself. Can't walk. Goes nuts, or gets stepped on." He flung his door open, climbed out. "Let's go!"

The darkness was tangible. Syrupy winds blew from the swampy country. Insects and crickets hummed, chirped, and shrilled. A near-human screech rooed the bearded cypress woods. Another wild cry answered, anguished and forlorn.

Mosquitoes swarmed at us. They dove like hell-hounds. Handcuffed, I was immediate prey, helpless to do anything but writhe.

"There's the canal!" White said. He ran ahead, like a bush-scout on safari.

Two more cars swooped down the highway. Insects seethed across their headlights. They squealed to a halt behind the car we'd come in. More uniformed cops, and three men—one with a camera—who were probably newspapermen, hurried toward us.

"Find anything?" one asked.

Larker shook his head.

"Here they are!" White called. He straightened, waving something.

A moment later I held the green play-suit in my hands. It was Carol's, beyond any doubt. I looked inside the handbag. Her red zipper wallet contained a driver's license, and some snaps of the two of us in comic poses on the beach.

"Too bad," Wolvern said over my shoulder.

In the handbag were cigarettes. Two empty match folders. A broken compact and a new one I'd bought for her. A clean handkerchief. A ball-point pen that hadn't written since she'd got it. A lip-stick. Bobby-pins. And—my hand trembled—a cellophane-wrapped cigar.

I gave everything back to Larker.

"Your wife's stuff?"

I nodded. The whole business seemed incredible. Abruptly I

pictured Carol in my mind's eye. Out there in that swampy country. In the night, the jungle—naked. Fighting off snakes. Vicious bugs. Lost.

If she were dead, it might be best.

Up to now I'd somehow managed to believe Carol still alive. I hadn't fully imagined her dead.

Now I realized she must be dead.

Somewhere lived the man who had killed. Somewhere lay the body of a woman who had been in trouble. And whose husband had been too blind to see it.

The police were getting nowhere. Not because they were slow-witted. They seldom are. Rather, because they were methodical. They thought I knew something. They thought me guilty. I didn't believe I was.

I didn't want method. I wanted action. To my muddled mind only one answer. Escape. But how did one escape from the police handcuffed? Blood pounded in my head. I had to take that chance. Larker helped, with his next words.

"Cowan. You going to tell us where you put her?"

I stared at him.

White spoke up. "We got flashlights in the car, Captain. Why don't we just look? I read

in the Police Manual where if a murderer is led anywhere near the body he's hidden, he's likely to show signs."

One of the newspapermen spoke up, "Jeez, I can see the caption: JUNGLE REVEALS STARK TRAGEDY."

White argued, "Stands to reason the body won't be far away. Cowan was looped. Time element's beginning to count now, too. He wouldn't've had much time to take her far. Probably figured he'd burn her clothes. So they couldn't identify the body, if they ever did find it. Then he forgot 'em."

"You'll be in plain clothes, yet," I said.

He flushed in the car's headlights.

Larker said, "Okay. Yeah." He looked at me. "May I have the privilege of damning you, Cowan?"

I hardly heard him. I didn't reply. My mind was busy. Not clear. Just busy.

We followed the canal bank. It seemed the likely path, for anyone to enter the snarled vegetation; the only path, in fact. Flash beams reamed the chittering darkness.

This I would have remembered. Stupid drunk, my mind would have still been receptive to such a picture. I knew I'd never been here before.

Touching my hands to my

shirt, I felt the snapshot inside. I pushed it down, so my belt gripped it.

My chances were a hundred-to-one—against me. If an opening came, I might not be in a position to take it. I didn't know the country. They outnumbered me.

"We'll spread out," Larker was saying. He directed the men into a line, forming to our right. Larker and I stayed on the canal bank, with White. "About fifteen paces interval," Larker said. "If you see anything, pass the word. Yell."

Minutes later, we were alone. The three of us.

THE GROUND was peculiar. Hummocky. Rounded hills swelled, covered with underbrush, pine, and knee-high grass. In the depressions, the ground was soft, boggy. Water stood stagnant, swarming with mosquitoes. Then I knew where we were.

The canal emptied into Boca Ciega Bay. On the opposite side of the waterway, a dark wall of jungle throbbed. He started up a rising hummock, beside the canal. If I could make the other side, perhaps...

"White," Larker said. "Take off for the car. Tell 'em to send some more men out. I got a hunch."

"Right," White said. "I agree.

D'you think it'll be all right
—alone with him?"

"Get going."

White hurried away. His
flash stabbed the darkness.

Larker and I stood on top of
the hummock. Directly below,
the torpid canal water glistened
like thick ink.

He turned toward me, his
right hand lax, with the flash
clutched in his fist. It had to be
right now.

There was the sudden hope
that Carol wasn't dead, the
realization that I had to speak
with Ella. I had to get away,
and there might never be
another chance. I had to find
who had done these things, who
had set me up.

Larker started to speak
casually and at that instant, I
kicked with everything I had.
The flashlight whipped from
his hand.

I flung myself off the small
hill into the canal. Scum-
clotted water burst around me.

Surfacing, I heard Larker
swearing. The canal wasn't
deep. But it was above my
chest. I invented a new swim-
ming stroke, with handcuffs.
Jumping, swimming, leaping in
terrific slow-motion toward the
opposite bank.

"White! White!" Larker
shouted. His gun roared and
flashed. "Stop, you crazy fool!"
Again lead slapped the water



nearby. He'd emptied his gun,
was reloading.

I didn't know whether I was
hit. All I knew was I had to
make that bank. The night was
like the inside of a snake's
stomach.

I heard Larker splash into
the canal. Then I scrambled up
the far bank. Sobbing, I
thought for a moment I couldn't
make it. The mud was slick
and oily.

"Stop, Cowan! Cowan!" Again
gunfire raked the bank. But he
was short and to the right. I
heard the sound of running feet
as I fought my way to the
mangroves. I hurled myself into
them. Gnarled roots and
branches snagged me.

On the other side, men thun-
dered to the canal, shouting
questions.

Then I was through the
twisted mangroves. Holding my

cuffed hands chest-high, I ran to the racket of gunfire. Lead snicked overhead in the trees. I thanked God for the dark of the moon. I ran like hell.

V

MY HANDS were cuffed. I was tired, beat out. I slowed to a steady jog, turned left. With any luck at all I'd make the highway before Larker and his men. Their shouting died in the distance.

At first they'd been able to hear me. But with their number talking, perhaps they couldn't now. I wanted to move faster. It was impossible. I ran as softly as I could.

As it was, the darkness was as much trouble as asset. The ground was spongy. The night was jet. I kept ramming tree trunks.

I reached the highway. Down to my left, men swarmed by car headlights. I rushed for the other side.

Here the going was better. Fields of dank grass, shoulder high, surrounded me.

Already the alarm was out. Road blocks would be set up. My only chance was to make Boca Ciega Bay. There I might find some way to get back to my house. It was the only place I could think of to begin.

I was really on my own now.

My first job was to get rid of the handcuffs.

I kept the steady pace. Likely they would keep heading north through the jungle. In the distance I heard the growling whine of a siren. Then another, blending with the first.

I remembered the snapshot. I got it out. It was soaked, but still whole. I slipped it into my shirt pocket. There, it'd have a chance to dry.

Deep exhaustion crept through me. But with it, my mind became clearer. Try as I might, though, I could find no logical answer to the mess I was in. Where was Carol? Was she really dead? One moment I believed she was. The next I refused to think so.

How had Carol been mixed up with the dead seaman? Who was he? One thing I did refuse to believe, that the man had ever been Carol's lover. I was sure of it. Then why had he been in our home?

I crossed a large space of pines. As I reached the other side, I stopped in a small clearing. A pile of sawdust rose at my feet. Stumbling around it, a halfborn thought took shape.

Then I saw what I wanted.

A buzz-saw was set up beneath a staggering shed without walls, with a hopeless roof.

The saw was connected to an old Model T Ford motor, set on

blocks, with a crank. I cranked as best I could. It wouldn't start.

One of the spark-plug wires was disconnected.

I hooked it back up. With the first whirl of the crank, the motor roared to life. I adjusted gas and spark. Went over to the saw and turned it on.

The band slipped. But by holding it with my toe, I kept the circular blade whirling. Then I faced the saw, held my arms firmly apart, placed the handcuff chain against the spinning blade.

Steel sparks, red-white, rained in my face. I sprawled back. Luckily I hadn't been hit in the eye.

Next, I approached it from behind. Straddle the belt, holding it in place with my left foot. This time I pulled the chain back onto the razor-toothed blade.

It screamed like a disembowled banshee. It jerked, tore at the tough steel. Red sparks flew into the trees. My muscles ached from holding the position.

Then my wrists grew hot. The heat became so intense, I cursed, forcing myself to stick it out.

And then the chain burst.

The teeth on the saw blade were ground flat when I stopped the motor. My wrists were

torn, bleeding and burned. But I felt better now.

Running was easier. I reached the bay. Beyond me, Bay Pines Veteran's Hospital reared its hulk against the sky.

I started down the beach. I had to find a boat. It was the only answer.

Rowboat hulls rested on lawns before beach homes. No good. In my condition, I couldn't row twenty feet. It had to be a power-boat. I had to steal it.

I approached a sign at the water's edge. Dim bulbs freckled with dead insects lit the place.

BAIT BOATS TACKLE

Live Shrimp

BOB'S BASIN

Bob may have been the sleeping individual on the pier by a wooden shed. I didn't intend to ask.

Short cat-walks went into the water. Numerous row-boats were moored there. I made out a *Chris-Craft*, bobbing at the end of the nearest jetty.

I couldn't pass the sleeping man. I had to go into the water. It was only knee-deep. I made the speedboat. Got in.

An instant later I was rushing out into the bay. The man was very much awake. He brandished his arms. His mouth was open. I couldn't hear what he shouted.

An hour later, after circling around past Gulfport, I came down the shoreline of Tampa Bay. Ten minutes later, I drove the boat onto the beach.

I was less than a quarter of a mile from my house. My hands were so sore I could hardly move them.

Coming by my work-shack, I stopped. It was dark. I went carefully inside. The familiar room hadn't changed. And Larker had told the truth. There were two empty whisky bottles, lying on the floor.

I started through the copse of slash-pines toward the house. I halted. There was a guard by the front door. He slumped on the porch, smoking.

I backtracked, headed toward the rear. A police car was parked in the drive. I wanted to talk with Ella. Looking up toward the bedroom windows, I made out a light in hers.

It would be ticklish. I hoped no one was with her.

I couldn't enter the house. Doubtless others were inside. But probably they were all downstairs. Somehow, I had to get to Ella; find out what had been going on. I had to convince her I was in the clear.

The back porch roof presented little problem. I climbed up on the very trellis Ella'd built and fallen from. I was glad, now, that she'd built it.

There was nothing to do but enter through the window over the porch roof. There was no other way to Ella's room. The window was open, but screened, locked on the inside.

Carefully, as quietly as I could, I forced the edges out until I worked a grip. Then I strained against the screen till the hook snapped. I waited, listening. There was no sound of alarm.

Crawling inside, I let the screen flap back into place.

The upstairs hall was dark. From the stairwell, I heard the sound of voices. Doc Fontell's reached me.

"No, gentlemen. I'd never have believe it. Never. Would you have another small drink, Lieutenant?"

"Well—very small."

But I had to make this fast. If Fontell came upstairs to see how Ella was, and saw me, he'd sound the alarm.

"Where d'you suppose he'd head for, Lieutenant?" somebody said.

"Two choices," the lieutenant answered. "He'd either try to get out of this section of the country. Or, he'd come right back here."

I didn't waste any more time. I went into Ella's room.

She was propped in the bed. Her eyes leaped wide at sight of me. I ran toward her. I'd

have stuffed a pillow down her throat, if she had yelled.

She didn't. "It's all right, Tommy!" She tried to sit up, fell back. "Close the door, I'll turn out the light." The room darkened.

"What's the matter?" I said. "A little while ago you hated me."

"Listen, please listen!" she breathed. I sat on the bed. Her hand rested on my arm. "I'm sorry, Tommy. Really, I am. I only believed what I heard."

I was trembling. "Speak up, Ella. For God's sake!"

"I've talked with Carol."

I gripped her arm now. I felt her wince with the pressure.

"Yes, yes," she went on. "Carol phoned. I took it in here, by my bed."

"Where is she?"

"Oh, Tommy! She didn't say! She didn't have time to say!" She swallowed. I heard the mumbling voices from downstairs.

"What did she say, Ella?" I tried to keep my voice low. Sweat trickled down my sides.

"Oh, Tommy. It was awful! She just said, 'Ella, Ella. Tell Tommy the green eyes of the god Lago! The—'"

"Didn't you ask where she was?"

"Yes, yes. I did. But that's all she said. Then the phone clicked. I think she tried to say

something. But I didn't get it. It sounded like 'rye neck'. It doesn't make sense."

None of it made any sense. The green eyes of the god Lago. Now what in hell did that mean?

"Tommy!" Ella's hand gripped me. "Somebody's coming. Must be Fontell."

Footsteps were clomping near in the hall. I ducked down, slipped beneath Ella's bed. I grinned into the darkness. Carol was alive. Then the grin went away. She'd been alive. Was she still alive?

VI

"ARE YOU asleep, Ella?" I heard Fontell whisper.

"No, Doctor Fontell. I just turned the light out to rest my eyes. How could I sleep?"

"Ah, yes." He walked into the room. The light came on. I could see his feet, and the cuffs of his neatly-pressed white linen pants.

The handcuffs still dangling on each wrist hurt like hell. Blood dried on the open wounds. The steel stuck, then pulled off. I lay perfectly still, breathed carefully.

"Is there any news of Tommy, Doctor?" Ella asked.

"No. It's hard for me to believe him guilty," Fontell said. "Extremely hard." I watched

his feet pace around the bed. "How does the cast feel, Ella?"

"It itches."

"Ah. It will itch more, my dear."

"Do you think they'll find what that green eye business means?" Ella asked.

I knew then that she had told the police. Doubtless it was her smartest move. She had no way of knowing I would turn up. Besides, what could I do with that information?

Then I did know what I could do. An idea, anyway. Whoever this "Lago" was, it was foreign. I wished Fontell would leave the room. I wanted to use the phone.

Fontell mumbled something, then said, "I make no sense of it. If Carol's alive, why doesn't she come home? Why didn't she say where she was?" He harumphed a couple of times. "Thomas should never have taken his gun from the bureau drawer in his shack. If he hadn't been carrying it around in his hip pocket, these things mightn't have happened."

"Yes. I feel sleepy."

Fontell said, "Good night," and left the room, closing the door. I snaked out from under the bed. Ella turned off the light again.

"I've got to use the phone," I said.

"I'll turn on the radio. That'll

make a background for your voice," Ella said.

She surprised me. I'd marked her down as a decimal point between two zeros. She flicked the dial on the small set at her elbow. Turned it loud enough to drown anything I said.

It was a crazy idea. But empires are born of crazy ideas. I had nothing else to go on. I placed a call for the Tampa Marine Operator. I remembered the sea-bag, on the cot.

"Tampa Marine Operator." The girl's voice was thick South.

"I need some information. D'you have ship listings? I mean, names of ships?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do me a favor. See if you have the Steamship *San Miguel* there anyplace."

"One moment please." While she looked, I heard the blare of a radio over the phone. Then she was back. "Marine operator. Yes, we have the *S. S. San Miguel*, sir. Would you care to place a call?"

"You mean, talk with the ship?"

"Yes, sir. The *San Miguel* is off *Port au Prince* right now. Whom should I call?"

I hadn't hoped for anything like this. "Why—why, the captain," I said. "Yes, the captain."

"That's Captain Western. Shall I call you back?"

"No—I'll hang right on here, by all—"

"Do you want it sent collect?"

I hesitated. It would mean giving my name, or an alias. He might not accept the call. I had to speak with the man, it was imperative. "No," I said, blurting it out. "Bill me. Tom Cowan, Palm City, 7-55563."

It was said and done before I'd had time to think, and I regretted giving my name immediately. All I could hope was that the operator hadn't read the papers. I felt sick, waiting, listening—and she was sending out the call to the *S. S. San Miguel*. It was all such a small world now, and shrinking every second. What chance did a man on the run have?

But I'd had to do this. All I could hope for was time.

"Tampa Marine Operator calling S. S. San Miguel! Calling S. S. San Miguel! Come in, please..."

What could I say once I got Captain Western?

"S. S. San Miguel. Captain Western, please. Call for you, sir. Mister Tom Cowan, Palm City. I have your call, Mister Cowan. Go ahead."

A great rush of air struck my ear. It sounded like they were pouring the Atlantic into my head. A faraway pleasant voice said, "Yes? This is Captain Western."

Now I had him. "Look," I said. "I'm trying to locate a man. Did you dock in Tampa about a month ago?" I reckoned time from the purple tie and the first sniff of cigar smoke.

"What was the man's name?"

"I don't know that. This is Police Headquarters in Palm City. D'you know what the green eyes of Lago might mean?"

Laughter greeted my ears now. Loud laughter. "The bloody fool's done it again. Sure. The green eyes of Lago are two large emeralds. About the size of pullet eggs. Very valuable. Lago is a sacred god of the Cunis Indians up in the Serrania del Darien."

"Very valuable emeralds, you say?"

"Extremely so. No telling how much they'd bring. King's ransom. And, yeah—we docked in Tampa."

I asked a few more questions. Captain Western was very thorough in his answers. He'd have been happy to talk all night. As I listened, I couldn't suppress a grim smile. The emerald eyes of Lago were indeed interesting.

After the Marine Operator signed out, I turned to Ella. She switched off the radio. "I've got to leave you for a little." I told her. "I'll be back."

She was sitting tense, prop-

ped on her elbows. "Listen, Tommy!"

Feet pounded on the stairs. Then, in the distance, I heard the *yi-yiing* wail of a siren for the second time tonight. It was nearing rapidly. "That's me," I said. I dodged into the hall, slid into the shadow of the attic stair alcove, as Doc Fontell raced for Ella's room.

I tip-toed down the hall, out the window on to the back porch roof again. I dropped to the ground. The siren wailed like a jilted tom-cat.

And I knew why, too.

It was that damned marine operator. She *had* read the papers and knew I was listed as a killer. It hadn't taken her long to call the police.

It had been a thin chance that she wouldn't know of me, and the chance had panned dregs.

For that matter the police might have been listening to everything I'd said over the phone.

But I still had one thing with me—the time element. That counted plenty. They didn't have me yet.

VII

I RAN for the copse of pine. It had started to rain, a slanting wetness. I cursed as I realized I was in for another soaking. But

thoughts were breeding in my mind. I hoped they'd come up with a strapping young idea, full of spit and go.

The police car was gone from the driveway. The guard on the front porch wasn't there. No cops on hand. Only the approaching siren.

I went over each point in my mind. And everything was suddenly clear. The motive for most of it was as plain as day. There were still a few things I didn't know, and they tended to erase satisfaction.

I knew there was little time. Speed counted now. I made for the bay beach. Then started back in front of my place until I came to the lawn of the house beside ours. It was set well back, shielded from our home by a tall hedge of Australian pine. The windows were dark.

Yet, I knew Carol was inside. She had to be there.

There was no stopping now. What time I had, I needed.

I hit the porch running. The front door was locked. It would be. I slammed my shoulder against it. It felt like I'd broken my collar-bone.

Limping to the nearest window, I kicked in the pane. Reached for the latch. The window opened easily.

Inside the room, I started calling. Not too loudly. "Carol. Carol. Carol!"

I went down the hall, looking in each room I came to. This house was also two-storied, old-fashioned, for down here.

Upstairs might be the answer:

A single room at the back of the house was locked.

I was ready to smash the door down, somehow, when I saw the key. I unlocked the door.

In the pale darkness, I made out a figure, lying across a bed. It was Carol. Her hands and feet were bound with leather belts. She was asleep. I shook her. She began to cry, groggily. "What—what is it?"

"Carol—it's me! Tommy!"

She'd been drugged. That was plain. The effects still hadn't worn off. I slapped her face gently, then quickly undid the belts. Already, she'd fallen back on the bed.

At least, she wasn't naked. She was dressed in white linen pants, and a white shirt. I shook her some more.

Then I heard the front door open downstairs. It slammed.

"Snap out of it, Carol! Come on, baby!" Urgently I pulled her up. Then I had to let her go. She sat on the bed, staring vaguely into the darkness, at nothing. She was coming to.

I made it fast and quiet from the room. There was plenty to fight for now. I had her back. I



knew I had her back. If I just didn't collapse from fatigue for the next few minutes, things might yet be all right.

I started down the stairs. A man was grunting and swearing in the hall. I made out the white figure of Doc Fontell. He was bending over something in the hall.

He cursed louder.

Ella was on the floor before him in pajamas. Fontell held a glinting knife in his hand. He was slicing at the cast on Ella's leg!

The next stair step let out a shriek. Fontell whirled. "All right, Thomas. Don't move. I see you."

He had drawn a gun. "I'll just come on down," I said. I worked my way down the stairs, against the wall. As I

came to the light switch, I brushed against it. The hallway was flooded with light.

Doc Fontell's glasses were askew. He looked anything but the haughty, self-styled aristocrat he'd previously appeared. He was a badly frightened man, right now.

"I'll have to kill you all. I didn't want this. I didn't want it this way, I tell you. I didn't plan it this way."

"What have you done to Ella?"

"She's asleep." He chuckled, shakily, but the gun in his hand was rock steady. "She'll never know the difference." A sad note crept into his voice. "Stand still, Thomas."

I watched him kneel. He kept the gun on me. With the other hand, he went on slicing the cast on Ella's leg. Then he tossed the knife aside. Prodded with his fingers.

"Ah, there!" he sighed. Again his hand dipped, grabbed. He held them up, one at a time. "The green eyes of Lago! Look at them, Thomas. Look at them!"

They were something all right. Two large, beautifully cut emeralds. Doc Fontell had gone to great pains to get them. There was only one thing wrong.

Doc Fontell put the gems in his coat pocket. Then he slowly

stood. I turned at a sound from upstairs. It was Carol. She walked slowly down until she stood at my side. I put my arm around her. She was awake, now. Her eyes were steady on Fontell, and they were filled with hatred.

I said, "You're handy with the needle, Doc. That's what you did to me, eh? Waited until I'd passed out, then jabbed me."

"That's right, Thomas." The doctor was very self-satisfied. But there was something quite grim about the way he approached, until he was about two yards away. "If Jack Standish hadn't come to your home, none of this would have happened."

"Jack Standish?" I turned to Carol. She nodded. The high-colored brass of her hair gleamed.

"He was my brother, Tommy," she said softly. "There was nothing I could do. He was in trouble, wanted by the police. He'd been in trouble before. He got those jewels in Central America, shipped back here. He wanted to hide out at our home till he could find a fence who'd handle them."

Carol shrugged. "None would. Not for the value of the stones. Forgive me, Tommy. I should have told you. I kept lying, and it only got worse. Jack said he didn't want you to

know. And I didn't want you to do anything to him. You might have."

"Yes. I would have. But never mind."

"Forgive me, darling. I know my mistake now."

"Don't get corny," Fontell said. "For your enlightenment, Thomas, I overheard her brother telling her about them. I stole them from his jacket pocket while he was downstairs. I made other plans. But you simplified them. Until now." He blinked gravely behind the shining lenses of his glasses. His mustache bristled.

"He's horrible, Tommy!" Carol said. "Once I came to, and got out of the room. It was before he'd tied me. I phoned Ella—"

"I know," I put in.

"He caught me. He hit me. I've had nothing to eat."

I said, "So, Fontell. You emptied the whisky from the bottles to make it look good. Took my gun. You drugged Carol, and killed her brother." I paused. "I knew it was you after I remembered that nobody knew I kept that gun in the bureau drawer of my shack. You were watching outside the window, while I drank."

"That's right, Thomas." The hammer on the gun in his hand clicked back, *snicker-snack*.

"You brought Carol over

here. You planted her green play-suit out by the canal. You dumped me over the pier, and left Jack Standish's body on the pier end, with a nearly empty whisky bottle. You fired a shot with the revolver in my hand, in case of a paraffin test. The shot went through the dashboard of my car. Then, you came back here. You found Ella on the floor of my home. You made a cast for her leg, and placed the emerald eyes inside it. I hand it to you, that was a good hiding place. If the police wised up."

"I think so," Fontell said. "You're very smart. I had many good touches. I left a cigar. One of Standish's. In Carol's purse, too. That was for your sake, Thomas."

He chuckled again. "I figured the police would find the car by the pier. They did. Then I called regarding the drunken man walking on the pier. I thought of everything, Thomas. I even forced Carol to phone from here. She tipped the police about a woman's clothes on Route 5."

What a buzzard.

"I hadn't planned to kill you. I reckoned without that. Now, I must. The police know something. They may get wise. It's best if you just vanish for a time. They'll find you here eventually. But I'll be gone."

"But why, Fontell? Why did you do all this?"

"Why?" His voice grew harsh. "Why, you say! Because I want people to know who I am. I'm a great doctor. I've discovered many things. But they won't listen, they won't listen. I'll make them listen now. They think I'm a little mad. They took away my license to practice in Mississippi. But I'll show them. I'll go to Europe. I have riches now." He calmed, thrust his gun hand forward. "Yes," he said. "I thought of everything."

"Except one thing," I said. "Those emerald eyes you have are fakes. They aren't the real eyes of Lago, Doc. You've been duped. Just as Jack Standish was duped. Just as many other men have been. You're a sucker, Doc. Those hunks of green glass in your pocket wouldn't bring ten cents at Woolworth's."

Fontell snorted. "Don't trifile with me, Cowan. I know better. I've looked them up, since. They're priceless. Absolutely priceless!"

"Exactly," I said. "Priceless. An old Indian talked them up and sold them to Standish for enough to live on pretty fancy for years. He'd done it before. I talked with Captain Western, of the *S. S. San Miguel* a little while ago. He told me the

story. The real green eyes of Lago are still right where they belong, in the Cunis Indian country. Western laughed his head off about it. He'd known some man aboard his ship got them. But he didn't know who. He suspected a cigar-smoking gent by the name of Smith. Smith was Standish."

Fontell's face began to fall away.

"That old Indian's been pulling the same stunt for years. He makes two green eyes, then sells them. Sometimes the customer recognizes them as fakes. Sometimes not. Either way, the Indian loses nothing."

"You'll die for that, Cowan!"

I hadn't moved from my position by the light switch. I brushed it with my elbow. Grabbed Carol. We crashed to the foot of the stairs. Fontell's gun blasted.

I shoved off the floor at his legs. Got him. But I had reckoned for an old, weak man. What I got was a handful of dynamite.

He clubbed me with the gun. I got his wrist, slung my weight against it. The gun clattered to the floor. I heard the front door slam open.

Larker shouted. "Somebody turn on the lights!"

Carol switched the lights on. The room was full of cops.

Fontell was strong as an ox.

He fought savagely, driving his fists at me. I was weak. My strength was poor against his.

He sprang up. Looked wildly around. I leaped at him again. He pushed me aside with a straight-arm, scooped up the gun from the floor.

"Drop it!" Larker cried.

Fontell laughed. He turned to me. Guns roared from the doorway. He staggered. For an instant, triumph showed in Fontell's eyes. He placed the barrel of the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

It was much later, when Carol and I stood on the porch. Larker was talking. Sergeant White waited impatiently on the lawn.

"The Tampa operator rang us in," Larker said. "Headquarters. We were still looking for you out on the pike. You're slick, Cowan. Should have been a crook—or a cop."

"I don't want either job," I said. "I just want my contract back with *Prinwell's Prime Soup*. That, and some peace with my wife."

"You deserve it. Half the bandage trailed off the cast on Ella Cordon's leg. That's how we found, and overheard, you and Fontell. A wily guy, that." Larked nodded inside, toward the white figure sprawled on the floor. He went on talking, but I wasn't listening. I heard

him say that headquarters had called Fontell, telling him I'd placed a call from my own home. That had tipped Fontell that something was wrong. He said the medical examiner was taking care of Ella. She'd be all right. I heard no more, because I was looking into my wife's eyes.

"Carol," I said. "There's one more thing I want to ask you." I reached into my shirt pocket. The snapshot was still there. It was pretty well mangled. "Look," I said. "This fellow must be your brother, all right. But the house—the porch, the porch swing. I feel I recognize that place, somehow. D'you know where it is?"

Carol held it to the light coming from the inside hallway. Then she looked up at me. Her chin quivered. Tears brimmed in her eyes. "Oh, damn you, Thomas Cowan!" she said. "Just like a man!"

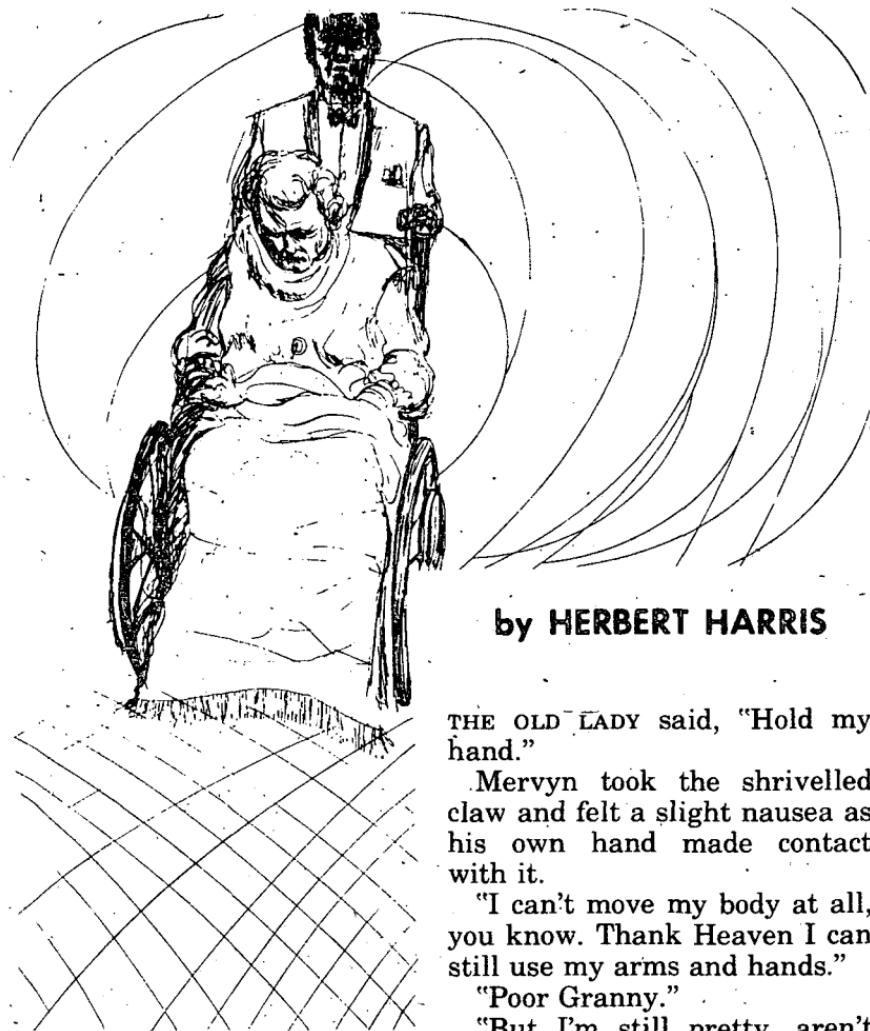
"But Carol, baby! What's wrong?"

"I was sitting on that porch swing when you proposed to me. That's my house..."

Good Lord, I thought. Here we go again.

But she laughed, then. "What could I expect of a guy like you?" We stood there for a long while. Her head was against my chest. I stared sleepily out into the pouring rain.

DEATH OF A BUTTERFLY



by HERBERT HARRIS

THE OLD LADY said, "Hold my hand."

Mervyn took the shrivelled claw and felt a slight nausea as his own hand made contact with it.

"I can't move my body at all, you know. Thank Heaven I can still use my arms and hands."

"Poor Granny."

"But I'm still pretty, aren't I?" demanded the scarecrow on the bed. Her smile revealed illfitting teeth, and the gaunt face looked more like a death's head than ever.

"Very pretty," Mervyn lied,

She had a little girl mouth and an old crone face. Still, Mervyn didn't foresee how long her lips would haunt him.

feeling a pang of pity. But there was more disgust than pity gnawing at his inside, disgust that had given birth to a smoldering hate.

"You're a good boy coming to see me," she told him. "One gets bored lying on your back all the time, not able to move one way or t'other."

"I'll keep on coming," Mervyn said.

"A nasty chore, isn't it? But it won't be for long, eh?"

Wouldn't it? Mervyn thought. It had already been much *too* long. With time no longer on his side.

The nurse came in and gave him a meaningful look. Her eyes told him he had been there too long. He didn't think she liked him, but then not many people did. The old creature-on the bed was obliged to like him because there was nobody else she could call her own flesh and blood.

When Mervyn went out of the room, the dour-faced middle-aged nurse slid quietly in his wake. As soon as they were out of the invalid's earshot, she said: "Your grandmother is not so well, you know. You mustn't tire her."

Mervyn answered bitterly: "She looked remarkably fit, I thought, for a woman who is practically wholly paralysed. Miss Lawlor."

"I hardly think 'fit' is the word," Nurse Lawlor said, tight-lipped. "She could die suddenly at any moment. You mustn't be deceived by her high-color. She still likes to use cosmetics, you know."

Mervyn concealed his feeling of revulsion.

"The poor old darling can never forget that she was a beauty queen," Nurse Lawlor added. "When you have been the prettiest deb, the most beautiful hostess, photographed everywhere, it's hard to break the habit of carrying on in the same image."

"Yes, quite," Mervyn muttered, walking away.

The nurse watched him go, then returned to the old lady's room.

The ex-beauty-queen sat propped up against the pillow, a mirror in one hand, a lipstick in the other. "Oh, Lawley!" she exclaimed reprovingly. "You never told me what a sketch I looked before my grandson came!"

"Don't be silly, you were looking beautiful," the nurse humored her. "I like that new lipstick color, though . . . goes better with the rouge."

"You think so, Lawley?" The old woman smiled with a real pleasure. "Can you see Mervyn from the window?"

"Yes, he's getting into his

sports car. He has a girl in the car. She must have waited outside for him."

"What sort of girl?"

"A girl with red hair. I've never seen her before."

Whoever the girl was, Nurse Lawlor thought, she would be unlikely to be any good. But she refrained from putting the thought into words.

In the red sports car, as Mervyn drove away, the red-haired girl asked: "How long do you think she's got, then?"

"God knows," Mervyn snapped irritably. "She looks just a bag of bones, but she could go on for ever and ever, I suppose."

The redhead snuggled against him. He felt the warm roundness of her thigh against his leg, smelled the provocative perfume from her hair and her body, realized the power she had to awaken desire in him as no other girl had ever been able to do before.

Her glistening mouth shaped into a sensuous pout. "Darling, Charles won't wait for ever for the money, you know . . . he won't wait longer than another week."

Mervyn nodded grimly. "Your charming brother has already made that clear to me. And if it wasn't that I was absolutely crazy about you, I'd go to the police and let your

black-mailing pimp of a brother rot in jail."

"You wouldn't!" she cried, her green eyes round with fright.

"Don't be a damned fool, Myra."

"No, of course you wouldn't," she said. "Everything would come out into the open. All the dirt about the club, and everything. It would ruin both of us, darling."

"You can say that again."

"You've only to give Charles what he asks, and he'll go right away—he's promised," Myra said, and kissed his neck.

Hell, Mervyn thought, if only that old scarecrow would stop hanging on to her miserable life. If she would only die . . . die now . . . immediately . . . he wouldn't have a worry in the world . . . her money would solve everything.

A rosy prospect indeed. It stayed firmly in his head, dinging away like a persistent tune.

IT STAYED for two whole days, urging Mervyn to make the rosy prospect a reality.

All he had to do was to smother the old dear. A happy release really. Nothing so nasty as poison or strangling. Well, that was the kind of murder you couldn't hide, anyway.

No. Merely put an end to her

breathing, that was all. Quite a peaceful death. The doctor wouldn't be surprised. She could go any time, he had said, when the paralysis got hold of her heart.

When Mervyn actually came to carry out the task he had set himself, he felt no particular regret. He had never really liked this conceited old baggage, anyhow.

The arms and hands put up no struggle, not even a feeble one, when he held the pillow hard against her face. And it was all over incredibly quickly, much more quickly than he'd thought.

Mervyn replaced the pillow and laid the dead woman back on it, just as he had found her. He smoothed the ends of the pillow out carefully, so that it wouldn't look as if it had been disturbed.

Then, wiping a film of sweat from his face with a handkerchief, he hurried from the room.

"Miss Lawlor! Miss Lawlor!" His voice sounded shocked and frantic, as he intended it to sound.

She came rushing up the stairs from the kitchen.

"It's my grandmother," he told her, gulping. "She had a sudden heart attack . . . a seizure or something . . . I think she's . . . she's . . ."

The nurse hurried into the room and looked down at the dead woman. "Go and telephone for the doctor, quickly," she ordered.

"Yes, of course!" Mervyn complied helpfully. He was glad, anyway, for the excuse to escape from that awful room.

After some minutes had elapsed, the doctor arrived. Mervyn had waited downstairs for him, and accompanied him now to the old woman's bedside.

The old woman was quite obviously dead. She looked peaceful, Mervyn was pleased to note.

Miss Lawlor drew herself up erect, her arms straight at her side. "Would you take a look under the pillow, doctor?" she asked quietly.

The doctor frowned. "Look under the . . . ?"

"She once hid some tablets under her pillow, and I looked to see if she had perhaps hidden some there again."

"And had she?"

"No, doctor, but I did find something else, something quite surprising. Look for yourself."

The doctor looked. He bent closer.

"I changed that pillow-case only a short time ago," Nurse Lawlor said. "And the pillow hasn't been moved. I mean, the

old lady couldn't possibly move it, and she can't possibly turn over on to her face, and so . . . you see, doctor . . ."

The doctor was staring incredulously at the underside of the pillow.

"The outline of the old lady's mouth . . . quite clear . . . in red lipstick!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," the nurse nodded, "she used cosmetics, as you know. She put some lipstick on just before her grandson came to visit her."

"The pillow must have been

pressed against her face!" the doctor cried in horror.

"Yes," the nurse said, "and whoever did that failed to look at the underside of the pillow when he put it back beneath the old Lady's head."

She turned hard, accusing eyes on Mervyn. The doctor was also was staring at him with a questioning frown.

Mervyn felt the sweat from his hairline trickle down his bloodless face. The old butterfly on the bed seemed to be flying around him. Then he fainted.

In the Next Issue—

THREE DOLLS, THREE CASKETS

A Thrilling New Mike Shayne Complete Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Someone was playing "Dead Little Indians" with the women Shayne was seeing, leaving a cold trail of lovely corpses in his wake. First was the girl with the hot reputation for destroying the lives of men; a death no one seemed to regret, but which affected many. Second was a petite young doll who claimed to be a secretary, but found out she was no man's Gal Friday. They found her in the trunk of Shayne's car! The third was a tough type of gal, who made the mistake of dating the redhead detective too soon for her own good!



Accuse Me, Please

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Strange was the tale he told, of lawyer's fees and fame and the death of an innocent girl...

LET ME BEGIN long ago, with this morning.

I checked in on the Geneva-New York flight, chose a rear seat and, once aboard, settled down comfortably.

I prefer sitting in the tail. Not because it's the only sec-

tion where, in case of a crash, there may be survivors. Not because of the window view, which is far enough aft of the wing to be unobstructed. Rather, because I'm a people-watcher and I like to observe passengers as they come down

the aisle and towards me. Their manner of walking, their expressions—it's the only diversion I can be sure of on a long trip. Because the kind of movie that most of the airlines consider appropriate—

Oh well. I won't go into that.

I'd looked over the passengers while we'd been waiting to board, and I'd wondered who'd be seated next to me. Probably not the slim, blond girl with the sophisticated make-up. Airlines don't usually mix the sexes, so I'd most likely end up with one of the three or four business men, or else with the bearded baboon. Or maybe with the short, dark, pudgy man who strutted like a pouter pigeon and acted as if he owned the airport. Whatever else, he looked interesting. But he boarded through the first-class entrance.

I was beginning to think I'd sit this one out alone, when a tall, spare man with black eyes, a thin nose and pocked skin came rushing onto the plane. Almost immediately the cabin door was slammed shut. He halted as if struck. Then he glanced around and began to relax, obviously congratulating himself on making the plane. One of the hostesses approached him, looked at his ticket and pointed towards me. He came over, nodded and took

the aisle seat, leaving a space between us. He sat down with a bounce.

"That was a close one," he said, shaking his head at the marvel of it. "The taxi I took out here got caught in traffic. I thought I'd never get here."

He was a good actor. About three-quarters of an hour ago I'd caught a glimpse of him on his way into one of the cubicles in the men's room. I didn't doubt but that he'd been hiding there ever since. But why? And why lie about it now?

I wanted to know, but I was pretty sure I'd get nowhere by accusing him, so I shrugged and spoke noncommittally. "Oh, they usually give you a couple of minutes' grace," I remarked. "Still, you shaved it pretty fine."

"Ah!" he said. His hand shook as he lighted a cigarette, and he was aware that I noticed. "Nervous," he said. "That last minute rushing—it got me." He took a deep puff. "Not that I wouldn't be nervous anyhow. I hate planes. They scare me. All this weight up in the air—not natural. I can't figure out how they stay up."

I grinned. "Well, they do," I said.

He amended my statement. "Sometimes," he said.

I didn't like that, but I was interested in why he was put-

ting on the act about almost missing the plane.

We sat there for a few minutes, sizing each other up and neither of us making a definitive judgment. Then, as the engines turned on and the plane started to taxi out to the end of the runway, he looked around furtively. The hostesses were up front, checking on seat belts, and he reached into his pocket and took out a pint flask.

"I need a drink," he said. "Join me?"

I felt that the best way to start off a friendly relationship was to accept, and I did. We each gulped down an ounce or so of bourbon from the pair of silver cups that screwed onto the top of the flask.

"Ah!" he said.

The flask and the cups were out of sight by the time the hostess checked on our belts. He was obviously afraid that if he was seen drinking, he might not be permitted the usual cocktails served as soon as we were up and away.

As matters turned out, he need not have worried. The blond hostess started the drink wagon at our section and we both took bourbon, the maximum of two apiece. As soon as she was gone, he freshened up our drinks with a generous shot from the flask. I think we both began glowing about fifteen

minutes later. I smiled and he frowned, but it was a friendly frown.

"What a time I had getting here!" he said.

"You were on business?" I said.

"You could call it that," he said. "Ever hear of the Belden case?"

"Out west somewhere," I said. "A murder that happened a few years ago, wasn't it?"

"Correct," he said. "I was attorney for the defense."

"I don't remember the details," I said, to start him off.

"I can give you all you want," he said. "There were plenty of details and all of them fascinating. I was a young attorney at the time. I aimed at specializing in criminal law, but it's hard to break in. I'd gotten a couple of court appointments to represent defendants who were accused of a crime and didn't have enough money to hire an attorney. The state appoints somebody, it's a good way to get started. Or maybe you know all about it."

"A little," I said. "Tell me."

That was all he needed. He took a sip from his plastic tumbler and put it down regretfully. He was off and going, while I sat back and listened.

"Imagine," he said, "a kid just six months out of law school, with no experience ex-

cept those two court-appointed cases, both of which he lost. That's me at the time—Albert Jay, attorney-at-law. And that's when I got a phone call and a soft, flattering voice with rich overtones, the kind of voice you instinctively like and trust, spoke. Even over the phone I almost felt as if he had one arm around me and was soothing me. I remember his exact words.

"'Mr. Jay?' he said. 'I saw you in court the other day, and I was impressed with the way you handled yourself.'

"Thanks,' I said. You can't resist that kind of a compliment no matter who you are, so I was amenable to whatever came next. I expected him to mention some kind of minor trouble and then ask if he could come to my office and talk it over.

"'Mr. Jay,' he said again, in that same soft, flattering tone, 'please listen carefully, because this is important. In a day or two you'll be asked to represent one Stephen Belden in a capital case. There's a big fee in it. Belden's a generous man and you won't have to haggle. You'll accept, but the purpose of this call of mine is to advise you to do exactly what he tells you to. If you do, you'll win the case, and you'll win it because at the appropriate time I'm

going to give you some information that will wrap it up. Agreed?'

"'Are you kidding?' I said. 'Why would Belden want to retain me? And who are you and—' But I didn't bother finishing the sentence, because the man I later on came to know as Archibald hung up.

"I guess you've heard of Stephen Belden, founder and president of Belden Electronics. He'd built up the firm to a net worth of around seventy-five millions, and at the time I'm talking about he'd just sold to one of the big conglomerates. Later on I looked up the transaction in the Wall Street Journal. Belden got ten million in cash, plus stock. He was known as a boy wonder—if you can be called a boy at the age of fifty. Anyhow, he retired young enough to have plenty of energy and to want to look around for a new career.

"After I got to know him, he admitted that he'd been figuring on an ambassadorship. He had the money to buy one and the connections to arrange it, but something went wrong. He'd stepped on a lot of toes on his way up, that much goes without saying, but he'd been unlucky enough to step on the wrong ones and he'd made some bitter enemies in the political field. They blocked

him and he had to kiss his ambassadorship goodby, and for good. Which was when that soft, flattering voice called him and asked for an appointment, under the name of Leslie Archibald. But I'm getting ahead of my story."

The ice was melting in our glasses, and Jay got up and walked the few steps back to the galley. He returned with a paper cup filled with ice. He divided it, and then emptied the flask into our tumblers.

"I have more in my briefcase, if we need it," he said. Then, after relishing a sip of his liquor, he murmured gently, "Archibald! That's not his real name, but it doesn't matter. He uses different names for different purposes, but Archibald is his favorite."

"So?" I said, prodding.

Jay smiled, and went on with the story.

"Picture Belden at this point," he said. "Out of a job. Under his contract of sale he couldn't go back into electronics. I don't know why the conglomerate didn't keep him on, but they didn't. He had a couple of children who were married and leading their own lives. He was sick and tired of his wife and he was finding out that his friends were not really his friends, they were merely acquaintances who'd had com-

mon interests with him, and no longer did.

"That was when Archibald appeared and presented his proposition." Jay took a deep breath. "I've seen Archibald," he said slowly. "He's a short, dark, pudgy man. He's not particularly prepossessing, but once he starts talking, that voice of his is irresistible. And he suggested that, for a half million dollars, he could arrange to get Belden accused of a murder and then acquitted.

"Belden told me that his first reaction was that he was dealing with some kind of crank, and the only question was whether to humor him or throw him out. But as Archibald kept on talking, he made a kind of sense. He pointed out that Belden was sick and tired of his wife, which was true, and that he was bored, which was true, and that he was aching for some kind of excitement, which was also true.

"Then Archibald pointed out the advantages of being accused of murder. Belden's name would be in headlines, he'd get more fan mail than a movie star. Women would romanticize him and fall all over him, if he gave them the chance. He'd be interviewed on TV and radio, and newspaper reporters would quote his ideas on crime, politics and the narcotics problem.

A whole new world would open up for him. And besides, he'd experience all the excitement and notoriety of a trial, but with a foregone conclusion. Belden would be acquitted, because he was innocent and Archibald would give him the means to prove it.

"Belden told me he was intrigued, but skeptical until Archibald gave him references. Two murder trials in the past five years. One in Oregon, the other in Georgia. Both defendants acquitted. Both of them clients of Archibald's. Call them, Archibald said, and confirm. Which Belden did. And while they didn't come out and say that Archibald had cooked up murder charges which were later disproved, the two men did indicate circumspectly that everything Archibald had said was true.

"Belden, like most so-called tycoons, was a gambler at heart, and this was the greatest gamble anyone could conceive of. Belden's life and liberty were at stake, and the game would be played out before the entire country. The prospect of a trial was engrossing, he'd match wits with a prominent D.A., and he was taking no real risks. The deck was stacked in his favor. Russian roulette? Maybe, but he knew which chamber held the bullet.

"Belden told me he investigated, and Archibald's story checked out. He generated considerable confidence in Archibald, and one of the things Archibald insisted on was to name Belden's defense attorney. The great, famous criminal lawyers whom Belden's money could so easily hire—they'd spoil the game. They'd either get the truth out of Belden and have none of the case, or else they'd handle it with so much expertise that the indictment would probably be quashed and there would be no trial. And Belden wanted a run for his money. So—a second-rate, inexperienced dope of a lawyer. Me!"

Jay almost spat in distaste. I said, "What about the person who was being killed for the sake of the spectacle?"

"The girl?" Jay said. "I didn't know anything about her until weeks after I'd taken the case. All I knew at the start was that Stephen Belden had been charged with the murder of a girl named Millicent Flanders, and that he wanted me to defend him. For a fee of a hundred thousand. I didn't know who Millicent was and I didn't know whether Belden was guilty or innocent.

"I accepted the case, and the first thing I did was to try and get Belden out on bail. In a

capital case the defendant is usually kept in jail, but I managed to convince the court that Belden was so prominent that there could be no risk of his evading his trial. And that's the only valid reason for bail—to guarantee the defendant's appearance at the trial.

"Belden didn't tell me much, at first. He said he had somebody working on the case and that important, new evidence would be forthcoming—which to me meant Archibald. I wondered where Archibald came in, but for quite a while I had no idea that he had—well—invented the case. All I saw at first was the spectacle of an exceedingly rich man enjoying the limelight. He hired a bodyguard and a receptionist, and he had an appointment secretary right in his own home. As his lawyer I seemed to be low man on the trapeze, but he kept telling me my time would come, I shouldn't worry.

"Belden lived a fantastic life during those days preceding the trial. His library, so-called, became a kind of press room, with a snack bar and a real bar open to all legitimate reporters. A television crew was there on a semi-permanent standby. Belden liked women, and a steady stream of them came and flung themselves at his feet. He had his pick, and he took it. Mean-



while he wrote a half-dozen articles for various magazines, with titles like how it felt to be accused of murder. That man enjoyed himself.

"I got to know him fairly well, and after we were on an intimate basis and just a few days before the trial, he told me the Archibald story. Believe me, it knocked me for a loop, because here was one of the most gigantic and monumental hoaxes ever perpetrated.

"I considered going to the bar association, but how could I? What Belden had told me was a privileged conversation, between client and attorney, and I had no right to communicate that information to anybody else in the world. My duty was

either to drop the case, or else to give Belden the best defense I was capable of. My oath, on admission to the bar, required me to do exactly that. To defend my client to the best of my ability. I'm a lawyer, not a judge."

Jay leaned back. Maybe, I thought. Maybe he's right, maybe he really believes that, but what about the girl? Doesn't human life come first?

Covertly I looked at him and saw a worried man. I had a feeling that his conscience had never let him forget the wrong he'd done, and that somehow the climax of his story was approaching. I knew nothing of Belden, but I did know that Jay had hidden in the men's room for almost three quarters of an hour, and that a short, dark, pudgy man was riding in first class.

"The girl," Jay said abruptly. "The innocent, sacrificial victim. Stabbed to death, and what for? I've asked myself about her a lot of times, but not then, not while I was defending Belden. I was too engrossed in his story and I was too busy building up my case. Don't you see what it meant to me? This was my chance, and how many people ever get an opportunity like that? How could I resist? Would you have?"

"Was she a friend, of

Archibald's?" I asked. "Did he have any reason for her murder?"

"No. If anybody'd had a good reason for killing her, the police would have run it down, and then what? Belden wouldn't have been accused, wouldn't have been tried. He'd have been a nobody. The whole beauty of Archibald's scheme was to construct a plausible case that we could later on disprove. He was not only fooling the public, but he was fooling the police, the district attorney and the entire judicial system."

"And you cooperated," I said. "You, a lawyer."

"My hands were tied," Jay said testily. "Besides, the girl was dead, wasn't she? I had no part in the killing. I was defending an innocent man. And as for Archibald, I hadn't met him yet, I couldn't locate him, I had only Belden's word for the part Archibald was playing. What could I do?"

Whatever answer I had bore no relevancy to the present, and I said nothing. Then the blond hostess, standing in the aisle, leaned forward to speak to us.

"Are you gentlemen ready for dinner?" she asked, and we nodded.

We spoke of other things while we ate. We commented on the food, admired the host-

ess, spoke of the miracle of flying, but we were marking time. As soon as we'd finished dinner and the trays had been taken away, Jay pulled a despatch case from under his seat, opened the cover and pulled out a bottle of brandy.

I was anxious to hear the rest of the story, and equally anxious to learn more about the girl.

"What about her?" I asked. "Who was she? What was she like and how did Archibald come to select her as the victim?"

"Millicent," Jay said thoughtfully, "was an unusually sweet girl, according to her friends. Attractive and likeable, and came from a small town. She worked as a secretary and pulled down a nice enough salary to have a two-room apartment of her own. It was furnished adequately and conventionally. She had several boy friends, and all of them agreed she was in love with someone else and expected eventually to marry him.

"Partly from a later investigation and partly from guess-work I think I can reconstruct how Archibald went about his plan. He had several girls in mind as possible victims and he sounded them out to see whom he could best use. His approach may have differed, but essen-

tially it consisted of making sure a girl wasn't gossipy. Then, after a suitable lapse of time and suitable preparation, he proposed to her. If she refused him, he simply crossed her off the list and tried the next one.

"Millicent apparently accepted, whereupon he dropped his other candidates. He told Millicent that he was married and in the process of getting a divorce, that he had a temporary decree but it would be revoked if it was discovered he was having an affair. He told Millicent that he was being followed by detectives and he had to be circumspect. He made her promise not to mention his name to anyone, or to tell anybody about him. She fell for his line and did exactly what he told her to, and that's why there was nothing that could possibly connect up with him. He became a mysterious lover, as intangible and insubstantial as last week's rumor. Archibald existed only in three minds—Millicent's, Stephen Belden's and my own. And Millicent is dead.

"The police investigation followed the orthodox lines in the case of any young and attractive female victim. They looked for a lover, and found out almost at once that there was one. The hard clues, however,

were almost non-existent. No letters or notes of any kind in his handwriting. Nobody had seen him and nobody knew his name. Moreover, the very lack of specific information indicated—and quite rightly—a deliberate attempt to set up anonymity. So the police concentrated on that angle, and the facts they dug up led inescapably to Stephen Belden.

"His name and office phone number were among those in her address book. His yellow Alpha Romeo had been seen parked near her house. The florist on the next block was certain that Belden was the man who'd bought cut flowers regularly, once a week, for the past month. The neighborhood liquor dealer picked him out as the customer who'd always insisted on the best—French champagne, and the most expensive scotch. And finally, Belden's fingerprints were found on a flashlight in the drawer of the stand next to her bed, and on a liquor bottle bought from that same package store around the corner.

"The prosecution brought these facts out one by one, and the florist and the liquor dealer identified Belden in the courtroom. There's something impressive about the way a D.A. can say to a witness, 'Do you see this man in court now? If

so, will you point him out?' Then the witness stands up and says, 'There!' And if he's properly coached and has any sense of the dramatic, he can make quite an impression on the jury.

"I did a competent job of defense, but my case was weak. If Belden hadn't brought the flowers and the liquor to Millicent, then what had he done with them? And the D.A. did a good job of drumming up subsidiary evidence. For instance, even though Belden didn't take the stand and presented no alibi, the prosecution was able to show that on certain nights—and they were the nights when Belden had presumably pursued his affair with Millicent—no one knew where he'd gone.

"It was tough on me, as a lawyer, because I had all the answers and couldn't use them. I knew why the D.A. had so much evidence: Archibald had handed it to him. Archibald had told Belden to park his car near Millicent's apartment, and when to do it. Archibald had told him to go into the florist shop and the liquor shop. Archibald had given him a flashlight to grasp and had asked him to take hold of a liquor bottle. Then, with Belden's fingerprints clearly implanted, Archibald had put both objects

in Millicent's room, for the police to find.

"I don't mind telling you I was worried. I began to think Belden was mad, the way he sat there and listened to the testimony. Nail by nail, the evidence was being driven into his coffin, and he was unworried. 'Just wait,' he said. 'It will turn out all right.'

"I didn't think so, and I was beginning to doubt the very existence of Archibald. Then, the night before the final day of the prosecution's case, that soft, flattering voice phoned me. 'Mr. Jay,' he said, 'I suggest that you recall Detective Stern, the fingerprint man, and ask him if he found any bloody prints on the murder weapon and if so, whose they were. Because that's your case.'

"Maybe I'd slipped up there. Stern, the fingerprint man, had identified the prints on the bottle and the flashlight, and he'd done a lot of looking around in that apartment of Millicent's and he'd been able to show the presence of a couple of Millicent's boy friends, but the knife? I'd been afraid to go into that. I'd figured it would be a story of smeared blood and smudged prints, of vagueness and innuendoes, which would prove nothing and make me look like a fool. But if somebody else's prints were definitely on

that knife, then Belden was home free.

"If I say so myself, I handled Stern nicely. I asked him if he'd found any fingerprints on the murder knife. He said he had. I asked him whose they were. He said he didn't know. I asked him if they were the defendant's. He said they were not. I asked him if he was absolutely certain. He said he was. Then I asked him why he'd suppressed this particular bit of evidence.

"At that, the D.A. was on his feet and objecting to the question. Objection sustained, quite properly, but I'd made my point and done it even better than if the question had been permitted. With that, I rested my case and asked for a directed verdict of acquittal. Motion denied, which worried neither Belden nor me. With that apparently suppressed piece of evidence and with the fingerprints of an unknown person on the murder weapon, we were home free.

"In my summation to the jury, I emphasized those bloody fingerprints. That, plus the fact that nobody had ever actually seen Belden with Millicent Flanders, just about knocked the bottom out of the prosecution's case. I felt I was a made man. My picture was in every paper, and fellow lawyers were congratulating me. They

figured I'd saved up the knife business for the last moment in order to get the best possible effect out of it.

"Well, the jury was only out for two hours before they came back with their verdict. Guilty."

"But how could they?" I asked in surprise. "The fingerprints—weren't they proof of his innocence?"

"Exactly what I asked one of the jurors afterwards, and he told me that the jury figured the fingerprint on the knife must have gotten there by mistake. Maybe the doctor had touched it, maybe the police. Somebody had pulled the knife out and had handled it, and therefore they disregarded the print evidence. Furthermore, the very dramaticness with which I'd brought the matter out made them feel I was somehow pulling a trick." Jay grunted. "Any trial attorney will tell you that you can't trust juries."

"And whose fingerprint was it?" I asked.

"Nobody knows, and least of all Archibald, who coated a piece of paper with soft wax and then pasted it on the lever of a slot machine. After several failures, he found that somebody had left a nice, clear fingerprint. Archibald had a rubber stamp made from it, and the

hired killer used the stamp to leave that bloody print on the knife. I'm quoting Belden, who got the explanation from Archibald."

I felt let down. The story couldn't end here. There had to be an explanation of why Archibald, or someone very much like him, was in the first class compartment, and why Jay had hidden in the men's room presumably so that Archibald wouldn't see him.

"What happened to Belden?" I asked.

"Sentenced to prison for life."

"But you had proof that he was innocent. Didn't you appeal and offer the new evidence?"

"Of course I appealed," Jay said, "but I had no new evidence. It was evidence known to me at the time of the trial, and as for bringing it out—even if I could have—it proved that Belden had entered into a conspiracy to murder. He had guilty knowledge that an innocent person had been killed, and killed merely for his amusement. Can you imagine what they would have done to him then?"

"Is he still in prison?"

"He died there a couple of years ago."

"Ever come across Archibald?" I asked innocently.

Jay took out the flask again. "Belden's will left me a million

dollars, for the purpose of meting out justice. Those were the exact words of his will. Vague to most people, but a specific instruction as far as I was concerned. He left me a million dollars to find Archibald and gather evidence against him that I could hand over to the proper authorities.

"It took me over a year and a substantial part of that million, but I did it, through the five hundred thousand fee that Belden had originally paid him. You see, it's not easy to receive and spend that much money without the Internal Revenue Service finding out about it. Almost the only way a man can protect himself is through a numbered account in a Swiss bank. And to trace it you have to knock on a lot of back doors and twist a lot of arms and spend plenty of money, all of which I did. That's how I eventually caught up with Archibald. I can prove income tax evasion, and maybe a lot more. And he's on this plane right now."

"In first class," I said. "I saw him. You were hiding from him, weren't you?"

I smiled.

"How did you know?" Jay asked. I didn't answer, and he went on. "I want to keep him in sight without his realizing it; so that when I turn in my evi-

dence I can tell exactly where to locate him."

"Suppose he sees you?" I said. "He'll lose you easily, once he spots you. Even a professional finds it tough to shadow a man who's aware that he's being followed."

"When Archibald finds out I'm after him and suspects why," Jay said slowly, "he won't run away. He's not that kind. I think he'll try to kill me. You'd better have his address and a couple of his aliases in case anything happens to me. And remember—if anything does, even though it looks like an accident—"

Jay took out a card and started to scribble on it. He was halfway through when a small, dark, pudgy man stopped alongside our seats.

Jay gasped, but the voice that spoke to him was soft and rich with flattery. "My dear Mr. Jay," Archibald said, "I always wanted to meet you. I'm your benefactor, I started you out on your career." And he smiled, sweetly and with an almost angelic expression. "Having a nice trip?"

"Quite pleasant," Jay answered. "I was just telling my friend all about you, in detail."

Archibald looked me over with a sad, almost compassionate expression. "Then there are two of you to take care of," he

said gently, and he turned and went back to his seat.

THIS MORNING seems a long time ago. I've dictated this account into the small tape-recorder that I carry in my briefcase, and I asked the trio across the aisle to listen to it, which they did. I think they realized my reason, and they were nervous as they returned the recorder. They were bubbling over with questions, but I cut them off.

"Later," I said. "Later on."

Then I took out the reel and wrote a note saying that now five people knew, there were five people to take care of, and that the evidence was on tape and in good hands. I rang for the hostess, and the blond one came.

"Would you deliver this to the captain for safe-keeping?" I said, handing her the reel. "On your way back please give this note to Mr. Archibald, up front there."

She nodded, and I watched her go to the cockpit, where she stayed a couple of minutes. When she came out, she stop-

ped at the second seat on the right, and leaned down to speak to Archibald. She handed him my note, and she was smiling as she returned to the rear of the plane.

I started to thank her, but I never got that far. "Look!" I exclaimed.

Archibald had gotten up and was heading for the cockpit. Just before he pushed open the door, I could see him take a revolver from his pocket. Then he closed the door. After a little while the intercom clicked on and the captain's voice spoke out, firm and steady.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "we're being hijacked, and for your safety I'm obeying orders at gunpoint and I'm heading for Cuba. All of you will be flown back to the U.S., probably tomorrow. You'll be quite safe. Meanwhile the bar will be open, on the house."

I don't know why Archibald picked Cuba. He had no political ties there, no reason to think he'd be safe. And he wasn't, because that's where they shot him.

As a capitalist, I think.

Next MONTH: STURM UND DRANG by Edward Y. Breese

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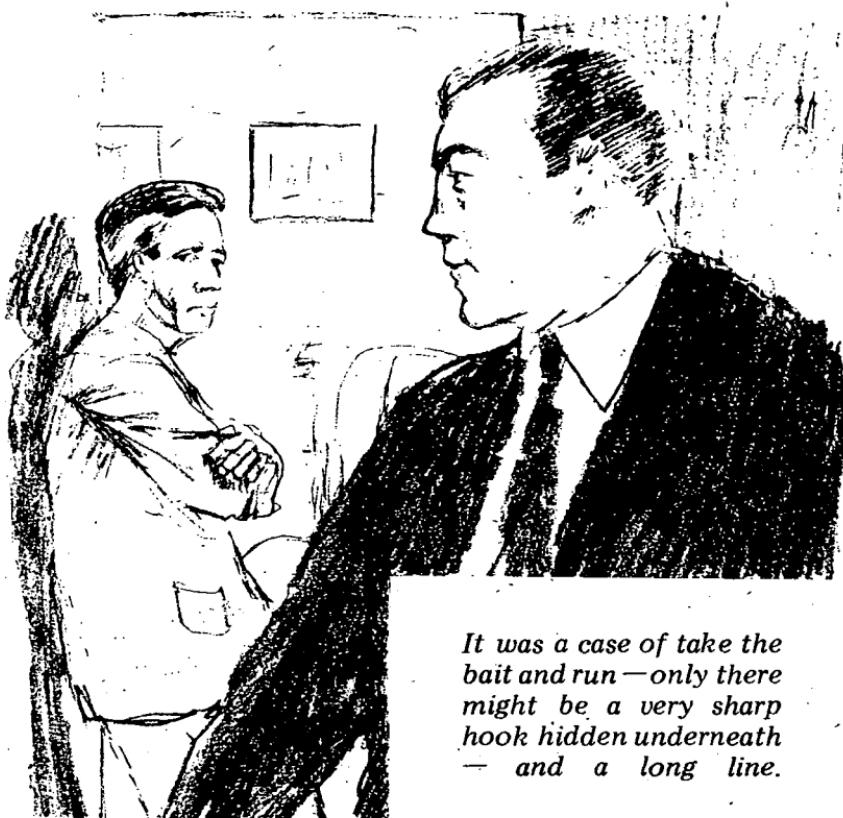
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FEBRUARY 1975



It was a case of take the bait and run—only there might be a very sharp hook hidden underneath — and a long line.

Rest Assured

by JOHN LUTZ

I HAPPEN to be standing by the window when Barclay Tompo drives into the parking lot. He is behind the wheel of that long black hardtop of his.

Slowly, majestically, the car glides to a stop beneath the big

neon sign that says WAYWARD MOTEL, and below that in smaller letters our motto, 'Rest Assured'. Red from the neon tubes glistens brightly off the well-waxed car, and as Tompo gets out I notice he is wearing his

usual tailor-made black suit, and despite the sun just going down he peels off a pair of tinted glasses. I will say he plays the role.

Turning from the window, I put him out of my mind and sit back down behind my desk to work on some bath towel order forms. A few minutes later a soft buzzer sounds softly to tell me someone is coming up the stairs, and there is a knock on my door. It's Tompo.

"Hello, Dennis," he says as I usher him in, and he can make even that sound like a threat. "The man at the office told me you weren't in so I figured you might be up here."

Tompo was referring to the real office downstairs where the guests register. My private office, up above and accessible by a private entrance, not many people outside of the organization know about.

"Have a chair, Mr. Tompo," I say, motioning toward the leather chair by the desk. I go and sit behind the desk and fold my hands.

Before sitting down Tompo walks to the small wet bar in the corner and mixes himself a Scotch and water. I suppose he doesn't have to ask me; he's number eleven in the hierarchy and I'm not even ranked.

"I wanted to talk to you about a little business matter,

Dennis," he says to me as he takes a seat now with his drink. "I believe we're in a position to help one another."

I let myself visibly perk up and try to sound flattered. "Help one another, Mr. Tompo?"

Tompo smiles as he sips his Scotch. "You may not have ever thought of it," he tells me, "but you're in a very unique position."

"How so, Mr. Tompo?" Now I am beginning to get really suspicious.

"You know," Tompo says, his smile widening in his broad face, "with this motel." Now the even teeth show white in the Florida tanned face, and the wavey dark hair glistens wetly as if it has just been combed. A handsome man but for the eyes.

"You've been running this motel eight years now," Tompo goes on, "and everyone in the organization trusts you completely. Now as we both know it's important for each of us in our business to have a good image, a legal image, and most of us if nothing else are wonderful family men. Despite our 'occupations' a breath of scandal could ruin most of us. The organization won't put up with divorce, carelessness, loss of public reputation. You understand..."

He is waiting for me to ask him to say more, but I only sit and look at him.

Unrattled, Tompo lights one of the thin cigars he always smokes. "Like I said," he goes on, "Everyone trusts you, Dennis. That's why when they want to enjoy a little 'romantic rendezvous' or when they have confidential business to discuss, they always rent a room in your motel."

"Mr. Tompo," I say, "the Wayward is as much the organization's motel as it is mine. After all, they financed the whole thing so they could have someplace like this to go to relax. And the business and love life of the top men is sure none of my business, or anybody else's." I am trying to discourage him as hard as I can.

"Right, Dennis," Tompo says in his deep voice, "but maybe it's time for you to show . . . a little initiative. I have a proposition for you, Dennis."

"I'll always listen," I say.

"How would you like to have a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Now I'll listen harder."

Tompo takes from the pocket of his streamlined black suit a very small streamlined box-like affair covered with perforations. "This is a super-sensitive miniature microphone and transmitter," he says. "It can be put anywhere, the base of a

lamp, attached to a bedframe, even under the plaster in a wall. And it can transmit up to a quarter of a mile into a tape recorder." He leans forward toward me with enthusiasm. "I've been in your rooms here," he says, "and I noticed all the mirrors in them. They have cameras now so small and quiet you wouldn't know they were there behind a two way mirror."

"You're talking about blackmail," I say flatly.

Tompo draws confidently on his cigar. "The top men wouldn't want their families and the organization to find out about some of the things that go on in your motel. They'd pay plenty to keep their secrets."

I nod. There's no doubt in my mind that what he says is true. "But, Mr. Tompo," I say, "the first person they'd come to if they were tapped would be me. They'd kill me for sure. Have you ever met George Galt and Clarence the Hook? Do you know how long it takes them to kill a man? Sometimes days, and he wishes he was dead after the first half minute. That kind of death's not worth a hundred thousand dollars or a hundred times that amount!"

I know that Tompo is acquainted with Galt and the one-armed and vicious Clarence. I know also that he has

hired them a few times to deal with his own enemies. They are the best money can buy to get you revenge and information at the same time.

"But a hundred thousand can take you where they'd never find you," Tompo lies to me. "Now the deal is simple. I set up the equipment tomorrow and hold back on all the film and tapes we make until you've got your money and a week's head start. You'll never make an easier hundred thousand, Dennis."

"I'd never sleep five minutes in a row the rest of my life, Mr. Tompo. You and I both know about people George Galt and Clarence have toyed with for a week. Thinking of that would cause me to have very bad nightmares."

Tompo shrugs. "I'm taking the same chance you are."

"But with more money, Mr. Tompo. You'll be able to run farther faster and be able to live better and longer when you get there. The kind of money you could get if you pull this off will buy you your own private bodyguard somewhere."

Now Tompo smiles broadly and flicks his cigar over the ashtray on the corner of the desk. "You want more money, don't you, Dennis?"

I shake my head. "You couldn't pay me enough to live

like that, Mr. Tompo. It takes better nerves than mine."

Tompo sighs. Then he crosses his legs, careful not to muss the neat creases in his trousers, and grins at me in a way I don't like. "I'm afraid you'll have to develop some nerve, Dennis. Do you think I would have come to you with this proposition if I wasn't sure you'd accept? I'm more familiar than you think with the work of Galt and Clarence the Hook. Once I was called in to identify part of one of their victims."

"What makes you sure I'll accept?" I ask, watching my hand shake as I light a cigarette.

"Easy," Tompo says. "The first reason is the hundred thousand dollars. That's a lot of money for any man."

"And the second?"

Tompo peers steadily at me through the haze of smoke I've exhaled, as if to tell me I can't hide behind it. "We have to go back five years for that, to right after the time Pete Flandell robbed that bank in the midwest. You remember, Dennis?" He purses his lips, smiling, and softly and easily blows the smoke away.

"What about it?" I ask.

"Flandell stole over fifty thousand from that bank, some in cash, some in negotiable bonds; a lot of it in bonds and

securities that he couldn't spend. The bank never did publicly break it down, I mean how much was cash and how much was useless to the thief."

I stub my cigarette out in the ashtray then sit back as far as I can in my desk chair.

"Flandell came straight here to hide under an assumed name," Tompo says, "and he brought the loot with him. But within two days he was arrested downtown, and that same evening he hanged himself in his cell. What about the loot?" Tompo snorts. "You turned the cash you said Flandell had kept over to the organization, twenty-thousand dollars. The thing you didn't tell anybody was that Flandell really had thirty-four thousand hidden in his room."

"Assuming that's true," I say as calmly as I can, "what has it got to do with your proposition?"

Tompo gets up and paces to the window, like an actor treading a stage. He turns and glares directly at me. "Before he was caught Flandell told one man about how much he'd gotten in the robbery. That man is very high up in the organization, and before he had a chance to do anything with the information, you contacted him. You told him about a little deal he'd gotten himself into in one



of your rooms, a deal that could have gotten him in big trouble with the organization. You said you had the whole thing on tape where it would be found if anything happened to you, and you offered to keep quiet about him if he'd perform the same favor for you. He agreed because he didn't have any choice, like you don't now."

I look down at my hand, clenched on the desk top. "You're talking about Frank Sanders," I say. "How did you find out about that?"

"Sanders was drunk one night, real drunk. And he confided in me." Tompo smiled his

even white smile. "He should never have done that. I got to thinking about the power you held over him, about the power you could hold over a lot of people, and I decided I wanted some of that power to turn into money."

"There's a difference in what I did and what you're talking about now," I say. "I only blackmailed Sanders because I had to. But more important, Sanders is only one man, with a secret he has to keep from the organization. Galt and Clarence can make any man talk; they could work on me and find out for Sanders if those tapes exist and where they are. Only Sanders would have to explain to the organization why he sicced them onto me. Nobody would have to step forward to explain away our deaths in this. Galt and Clarence would be working for the whole organization."

"Right," Tompo agrees, "that's why I'm taking the money in one chunk and getting away by an escape route I already have set up. And you'll have to do the same thing. Unless you want me to tell the organization about both you and Sanders..."

Tompo crosses his arms and leans back against the wallpaper. For a long time I look past him out the window at the

distant lights passing by on the highway.

"You can have Galt and Clarence the Hook after you," Tompo says with a smile, "or you can have Galt and Clarence the Hook after you, with a hundred thousand in your pocket."

I pick up a paperclip from the desk and hurl it into the wastebasket. "Neither choice appeals to me much," I say, "but I'll have to go with the hundred thousand."

"No real choice at all," Tompo says, walking toward me. He stands on the other side of the desk, looking down at me. "I'll be by tomorrow with the rest of the equipment. It'll take a few days to get things set up. I'll meet you here in your office at one o'clock."

"I don't know," I say, standing, "I've got an appointment for lunch, and then—"

His fist smashes into my mouth—a flash, numbing pain, and I am sitting again in my desk chair, slumping with blood running onto my shirt from a split lip.

"Break any appointment you might have," Tompo says in a soft voice. "And always remember who's running this operation and what will happen to you if you decide to back out or get talkative."

I straighten in the chair and

dab at my mouth with my handkerchief.

"One o'clock tomorrow," Tompo says, then he turns and leaves the office.

I stand, feeling slightly dizzy for a moment, and walk to the window. Below me Tompo leaves the building, walks briskly to his car and gets in. I watch until the taillights of the black hardtop blend into the stream of red pinpoints moving away on the highway.

Glancing at the blood on my handkerchief, I return to the desk and pick up the telephone. I dial quickly, firmly, and listen as the phone at the other end of the line rings four times.

"Mr. Sanders, please," I say to the voice that follows the click.

There is a long pause.

"Frank Sanders here."

"This is Dennis, Mr. Sanders. I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but Barclay Tompo just left here. He offered me the blackmail proposition."

There is a long sigh at the other end of the line. "And I'm sorry to hear it, Dennis. I thought Tompo was a promising one."

"He didn't surprise me so

much," I say. Mr. Sanders might be disappointed, but he'd be more disappointed later if he didn't have this little loyalty test to put his lieutenants through before moving them up in the organization. Of course, he knows that, or he wouldn't have invented the test. And there hasn't been a leak in his end of the organization in five years.

"The ones who can't be trusted way down," Mr. Sanders says, *"they always give in to temptation when they hear you can be had, Dennis. Who really knows about a man?"*

"I guess you do, Mr. Sanders, now."

"I guess so, Dennis. Thank you."

"And, Mr. Sanders... Tompo kind of roughed me up-a little, Mr. Sanders. I'd sure appreciate it if you'd ask Galt and Clarence to be extra nice to him."

Mr. Sanders will do that, I know. He's a real accommodating guy, always ready to do a favor, and an excellent family man.

Still, as I hang up on him I shiver. Then I go back to my desk and get to work again on those bath towel orders.

BUY "MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE" EVERYWHERE



THE QUEER MONEY

by

PAUL
YAWITZ

Clever they were, and cautious, the counterfeitors, but Tex Browder knew one thing they weren't: gamblers.

TEX BROWDER pounded his chubby fist into the arm of the over-stuffed chair in the Inspector's office at the Treasury Department. "I'm a gambler. I risk my money on my skill at cards. I pay my taxes because I never had a losing year, and what's more I'll buck any rattlesnake that thinks he can take me, and I don't ask him to prove he has a legal father. It's none of my business," he expounded.

The inspector grinned as Tex Browder bobbed his round head so emphatically that his ten-gallon Stetson fluttered like a mustang's mane in a Panhandle hurricane. "That's the reason we sent for you," the Inspector explained. "We need your uncanny talent. There's been a buy of a \$100,000 worth of counterfeit bills, and we're certain the buyers are in Nevada."

"I'm not a fingerman. Never

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was, never will be," Tex Browder spouted as if his integrity had been bruised. "You got a staff of man-hunters as big as the Alamo. Why do you need me?"

"Because the buyers aren't going to expose themselves by passing out the paper bill by bill. They'll avoid the crap tables in Reno—and Las Vegas and all the race tracks because they know we're on the job. We can't make a collar until they make a move. You're the hope we have to flush them into the open."

"Flattery never beat a royal flush, yet, Inspector," Browder retorted; blotting the sweat off the inner rim of his hat with his fat thumb, "but if you're challenging my good citizenship—."

The Inspector interrupted eagerly with a grunt of assent, and Browder sucked his lips reflectively. "Okay. Tell you what I'll do. I'll get them queer passers out into the open. But it's got to be my own way and on my own terms. None of your hounds tagging me. And no arrests in my presence. If these gophers you want are still diggin' around Nevada, I'll make 'em vulnerable. They'll hang themselves. Understood?"

The Inspector extended his hand. Browder shook it. "This is what you call a psychological



caper. My fee is sixty dollars an hour, same as all the head-shrinkers." It was a deal.

WHEN the glistening black Cadillac with its glazed long-horns perched above the windshield roled into South Shore at Lake Tahoe, word travelled the invisible grape-vine into all the gambling warrens that That Man Tex was in town. His very appearance was a summons for action at the private poker tables, but an hour in Harrah's lobby proved totally uneventful. The big money pros were evidently out of town.

So Tex Browder picked up Tom Sevens, his trusted six-foot-four heavy, and pushed on to Reno. The muscular body-guard always sat in the back seat, better to protect Browder and his dispatch case which often carried a bankroll of more than six figures. The case was as much a part of his wardrobe, as the thin string ties that dangled on his bulky chest.

As they approached the wash that is the Truckee River on Reno's outskirts, Browder's eyes were glued to the rear-view mirror. "There's a big car tailing us the last ten miles," he said. Sevens reacted with his hand on his holster. "I'll slow down. Let 'em catch us."

A minute later the car drew alongside. "No Neck" Knox, a

huge man with his head buried in his clavicles, pushed his shoulders out a window and shouted, "Hey, sucker, take your nervous hands off that iron. It's amateur stuff from the Jackass Flats in Texas where your boss at the wheel hails from. All we're looking for is a little table-stakes action." He pointed majestically to the two companions beside him. "My pals, Tracy Pollard and Charles Q. Welt. Oklahoma oil kings. They're loaded."

It was late in the evening when they all reached the hotel room, and "No Neck" busied himself with an overstrained fervor adjusting a smooth covering for the table and marshallng cards and drinks from room service. When they finally settled down for the game, the players placed heaps of cash before them, and Sevens took guard position by the locked door.

The betting started early on a grand scale. Pollard and Welt laughed with the abandon of millionaire playboys who had little respect for money, and when "No Neck" hauled in his first major pot, he winked at Tex Browder with a camaraderie that signified he and Browder had a couple of pigeons in tow. Browder resented the implication, especially from a cheap marauder

like "No Neck," but this time he deliberately managed a friendly grimace.

After three hours and despite the fact that he had been involved in every large pot, Tex Browder was still about even. "Shu-uks," drawled Welt in his gentlemanly Oklahomese as he ruffled the bills before him. "We're all in a squirrel cage. Everybody's just where he started." His companions paused for a personal audit and agreed.

"Can't raise the limit in a table-stake game," Pollard sighed with philosophical charm, "not unless we play for oil rigs instead of dollars." In the laughter that followed no one noticed "No Neck" extracting certain bills from his stack and inserting them into his bulging vest pockets.

Welt was more obvious. He took a wad of cash off the table and stuck it into his coat. "Just to change my luck," he apologized grinning with a warm innocence. "Wouldn't mind losing if there was real action. It's wobbling on a see-saw that bores me."

An hour later, with winnings and losses still negligible, the

game broke up. "No Neck" complained of lack of sleep the night before, and the cheery oil buccaneers yawned and suggested the game be recessed to the following day. They drank to each other's good health and departed.

Sevens was perplexed. "Funny sessions for a gang who chased us miles for a game," he commented.

Tex Browder belched a flesh-quavering laugh and pointed to his money on the table. "All that dough. I got there is queer, counterfeit. Those three bums are buncos. They kept putting my money in their pockets and switching this junk off on me. They think they put one over. Now they feel secure and they'll be passing my money all over town."

Sevens shook his head. "How can your good money hurt them?"

"They'll find out." Tex Browder had now subsided to prolonged chuckles. "The minute the dough they took from me gets into circulation, they're dead. My forty grand was counterfeit, too. It was bait the G-boys lent me to set this little trap."

Soon—Another "DIFFERENT" Story

Dead men tell no tales
but sometimes they can
speak to the blind . . .

DEADLY PERCEPTIONS

by

JOHN F. DOBBYN



FOOTSTEPS through the hall and three rapid knocks on the door forced Professor Hart to withdraw reluctantly from his reading and illuminate the pitch darkness of his study.

The gentle rain on the roof and window ledge muffled the reply to his automatic "Who's there?" But his twenty-five years of unmolested residence in the university community had conditioned him to bid entry to strangers without hesitation.

At his invitation, this particular stranger opened the door and threaded his way around scattered volumes of Braille to grasp the professor's outstretched hand.

"How are you, Professor?" came a quiet voice.

"Mr. Lucas, thank you for breaking the boredom of a rainy afternoon. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you, Professor, but how did you know my name? We've never met, and I thought . . . I mean, I had heard you were. . . ."

"I am. Don't be uncomfortable. You know blindness is relative. As long as the mind receives information, it doesn't really matter which of the five senses delivers it. You'd probably look to a person's face for his identity. I just look for other indications. In your case, I could simply substitute the

sense of hearing for the sense of sight.

"You crossed from the door to this chair in four steps. That gives me a fair idea of the length of your stride, and from that I deduce that you stand about six foot two. The weight and rhythm of your footsteps make you an athletic two hundred or so pounds. You're obviously from Chicago, a senior, left-handed, and probably single."

"How could you possibly know that, Professor?"

"I do get a bit ahead of myself. You see how rapidly the mind makes these calculations once it's trained to listen rather than just hear. First, your Chicago accent is easy to distinguish. Secondly, your knock on the door had the sound of a heavy ring—the type that seniors have been receiving this week. The sound is much heavier than that of a wedding ring. I confirmed the fact that you knocked with your left hand when we shook hands. You have no ring on your right. Hence a left-handed, single senior from Chicago."

"But how could you deduce my name from that?"

"Actually I had more to go on. Your handshake indicated well-conditioned muscles, recently exercised since the veins on the back of your hand are

still swollen. The practice football field is just a hundred yards beyond that window, so I was aware that practice ended about twenty-five minutes ago—just about time for you to shower and walk over here. By mentally matching your personal statistics against the university's football roster, it was a simple matter to conclude that you're probably Paul Lucas."

"That's incredible, Professor."

"Just parlour tricks, Mr. Lucas. Now can I help you?"

"I've heard that you've helped other students with personal problems, so when I received this note in the mail this morning, I thought I might show it to you for your advice before bringing it to the police. It says:

'Mr. Lucas;

'You will see to it that Central University wins the football game on Saturday, October sixteen, by no more than seven points or it will be your last game.'

What would you advise me to do, Professor?"

The professor took the note in his hands and ran his fingers delicately over each physical feature. He put the paper down and silently rested his head back against the cushion-

ing of the chair, as if to let the pieces of data fall into a probable pattern. A minute later he sat up.

"Mr. Lucas, a trace of tobacco on your breath tells me that you're in the habit of smoking a pipe. Do you have it with you?"

The visitor, by this time beyond being surprised at the professor's techniques, handed him a pipe from his raincoat pocket. The professor scraped a bit of carbon from the bowl of the pipe and tasted it. With a faint smile of recognition, he handed the pipe and letter back to the student.

"My advice, Mr. Lucas, is simply to pay Professor Lee the amount of the wager. You've lost."

"Professor! How did you know?"

"I assume in the first place that you typed the note yourself. This paper is the brand sold here in the university bookstore. I know it was typed on the kind of mechanical typewriter that's usually owned by students because the impressions show uneven pressure on the keys, unlike the impressions of an electric typewriter. The depth of the print shows that the typist had strong, but I must say insensitive fingers."

"All this might mean nothing until you add the fact that you

couldn't have received this letter in the mail as you claimed. The creases are too slight to have been subjected to the pressures of the usual mail packaging and handling. That led me to wonder why you created this story."

"Then I remembered noticing the faint smell of nitric hydrochloride on your hands. You're undoubtedly majoring in chemistry, since that chemical is only used in the synthesis of rare gases in an advanced chemistry course. That would bring you into contact with my old friend, Dr. Lee of the chemistry department, who, I might add, is not above testing my abilities with an occasional practical joke."

"I couldn't be sure how well-acquainted you and Dr. Lee were until I tried a simple test. He's quite fond of a blend of tobacco that he imports from Hong Kong, and he invariably offers it to pipe-smoking friends with whom he has more than a passing acquaintance. The carbon left on the pipe bowl by that tobacco has a distinctive taste. Once Dr. Lee entered the plot, it was a fair guess that you'd been put up to one of his games, probably by the inducement of a wager."

"I assume, by the way, that you were on the losing end from the fact that you were

nervous enough about selling your story to me to hesitate for some minutes downstairs in the hall before coming up."

"How did you know that, Professor?"

"The rain has been steady all afternoon, but when you came into this room your clothes had none of the sounds or smells of wetness. You must have delayed long enough for them to dry. I can think of no other reason than that you needed the time to work up your nerve."

"I can't believe that you did this with just four senses."

"It's not the senses, it's the mind that does it. If the mind is alive and searching and reasoning, four senses are more than enough to supply it with raw material. And now that that's finished, will you help yourself to coffee?"

"I'm a bit embarrassed for wasting so much of your time already, Professor."

"Please relax. I enjoy a good game. Oddly enough you're the second student to call today with a personal problem. I'm expecting one of your classmates in half an hour. In the meantime will you tell me who dreamed up this little puzzle? Was it you or Dr. Lee?"

For the next hour and a half the professor's mind darted between his conversation with

Paul and an echo of the voice he had heard on the phone that morning...

"Professor, I can't talk over the phone. Please be free to come with me at nine o'clock tonight. Perhaps you can stop it. I'll be at your home at five this afternoon to explain...."

At six o'clock, muffled chimes stirred the professor's awareness that his second appointment was over an hour late.

"It seems that your classmate's problem has solved itself without me, Paul. Would you care to walk over to the Faculty Club with me? I have a standing appointment for dinner every Tuesday evening with your mentor, Dr. Lee."

Their walk was interrupted by the hail of a breathless figure approaching at a full run.

"Professor Hart! The Dean wants you to come to the senior dorm right away. A student was found in his room dead. The Dean would like to have you there when the police investigate."

"Who was the student?"

"Andrew Barnes."

"That's the fellow I was expecting at five o'clock, Paul. Do you know him?"

"Very well, Professor. I'd like to go with you."

They arrived as Lieutenant

Cobb was about to release the body to the coroner for an autopsy.

"Lieutenant, I'd appreciate a chance to examine the body before it's moved."

"Of course, Professor. I don't think you can add much this time. It looks like a simple over-dose of heroine. We found him lying there on the couch with a hypodermic syringe on the floor beside him. Those little puncture scabs on the left arm tell the story. He's been hooked for some time."

With fingers like eyes the professor examined the young corpse—head, arms, legs, feet, clothing.

"Did you find anything in his pockets, Lieutenant?"

"Nothing significant, Professor, just some change, keys, and this little good-luck-charm."

He handed the professor a small metal disc imprinted with the form of a fish between two letters "X" and "P".

"Paul, does this mean anything to you?"

"It looks like the old symbol Christians used to use—the fish and the Greek letters "Chi" and "Rho" as an abbreviation of Christ. I think Andy was active in one of the religious clubs on campus."

"I see. Well thank you for letting me intrude, Lieutenant.



Paul, will you walk out with me?"

The wet night air cleared away the musty smell of death.

"That's really a shame, Professor. I knew Andy was playing around with heroine for some time. I guess it just caught up with him."

"Your friend was murdered, Paul, and it wasn't done here. He was carried to that room after he died. Whoever injected an overdose of heroine into his left arm wasn't aware that he was left-handed."

"What makes you think he was left-handed?"

"The muscle development in the fingers of the hand you favor is always different from that of the other hand. You can't see the difference, but if you know what to look for you can feel it."

"How do you know he was killed somewhere else?"

"Parts of his clothing were still damp as if he had been out in the rain, but the bottoms and crevices of his shoes were completely dry. He must have been carried here from somewhere outside the building."

"He could have been wearing boots or rubbers."

"That's good thinking, but rubber or synthetic boots leave a detectable odor on the shoes. It wasn't there. Paul, I could use your help later on this evening. Could you be free if I call you?"

"I'll be at home any time you call, Professor."

WHEN HE REACHED his apartment, the professor immediately called Dr. Lee to apologize for missing their dinner engagement. Mrs. Lee answered on the first ring. From the tone of her voice, it was obvious that she was hoping that this call would relieve some pressing anxiety. She explained that Dr. Lee had received an

unusual letter that morning containing a metal disc and a note in three words—"Tonight at 9:30."

His face had turned to chalk, and he left without a word. She hadn't seen or heard from him since. At the professor's request she described the disc. It matched the one found in Andrew Barnes' pocket. The professor asked if Dr. Lee had been out of the country lately. Mrs. Lee explained that he had taken a trip to mainland China during the summer to visit relatives.

It was all Halt needed.

As the clock struck eight, the professor raced through the rain to the main campus library. He cornered the first student he could find to act as his eyes and made his way to the anthropology alcoves.

He directed the eyes and hands of the student until they found the material he needed. Then he focused every attentive nerve on the words the student read. When the reading stopped, he slumped back into the chair and strained every mental resource to draw the pieces together. The distant chimes tolled nine. Time was running out.

At nine-fifteen he bolted out of the chair and found the nearest telephone. As soon as Paul Lucas answered, he asked

him to follow two instructions to the letter.

"First try to reach Lieutenant Cobb wherever he is and ask him to bring help to the mock courtroom in the unused section of the old law school quarters at exactly nine thirty-five—not one minute on either side. Second, come there yourself, but don't arrive until after Lieutenant Cobb."

The professor made one more call and then quickly worked his way across campus to the old law school section. This area had been practically deserted since the completion of new law school facilities. It took him precious minutes to find his way through corridors he had not used in years. At last he felt the leather-covered door that led to the old mock courtroom. His fingers felt the hands on his wristwatch—exactly nine-thirty.

The silence was split by the groan of hinges and the echo of deliberate footsteps as the professor walked to the center of the room. His voice boomed in the emptiness.

"Has the trial begun?"

Silence.

"*Has the trial begun?*" The air shook with the increased volume.

"You shouldn't have come here, Professor." The unfamiliar voice came from his left, the

location of defense counsel's chair.

"You're interfering in things that are none of your business, Professor." This time the voice came from his right, the prosecutor's chair.

"It's too late to go back now, Professor." From behind him, the spectator's section.

"You're forcing us to take action against you too." To his right, the jury box.

"Silence!" An authoritative voice from the judge's bench.

Each voice was muffled as if emanating from a shroud or hood. The voice from the judge's bench continued.

"What do you know about us, Professor?"

"I know that you're a throw-back to a time we'd do well to forget. I've come across your symbol twice today—once on a dead student, and again in the hands of a terrified professor. I first thought you were hiding behind symbols of Christianity, but then I remembered hearing about secret extremist societies that use the methods and signs of ancient Aztec religions. I did some research and it turned out that what I thought was the Christian symbol of the fish was actually a pirana to symbolize the scavenger that 'purifies the waters of all foreign elements.' What I thought were the Greek letters

"Chi" and "Rho" were actually the English letters "X" and "P" standing for the ancient Aztec secret society, Xythan Praxtles.

"I learned that this band of self-appointed purifiers would always perform a mock trial before executing the ones they chose to eliminate from society. That gave me a fair clue to the place of your meeting—a deserted courtroom. I got the time from the wife of the victim you've chosen for tonight. By the way is Dr. Lee here?"

"He's present, but I'm afraid he's bound and gagged, so he might have difficulty acknowledging your concern."

The professor checked his watch—nine thirty-four.

"I can guess that Andrew Barnes was one of your members who had a falling out and had to be eliminated. And Dr. Lee smuggled the heroin."

"You should have left matters in the hands of the police, Professor. They accepted the accidental over-dose theory. How do you propose to help Dr. Lee now that you're here?"

The professor checked his watch. The last few seconds to nine thirty-five ran out. He braced himself for the entry of Lieutenant Cobb, but the silence continued. After a minute, the professor relaxed and said:

"Hello Paul. I was afraid you

were one of them, but I had to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"I'm sorry, Professor. I thought I had you fooled."

"You volunteered the information that Andy Barnes had been using heroine for some time. Whoever killed him had tried to make it look that way with a number of skin punctures in the arm. But all the scabs were fresh. With a real addict, they would have been at different stages of healing. I imagine that when it became known that Andy Barnes was coming up to my apartment, you were assigned to keep an eye on me until he could be taken care of—hence that little game you dreamed up this afternoon."

"You're in good form, Professor, but it must be obvious to you by now that I never called the police for you."

"I wanted to trust you, Paul, but I never let sentiment outweigh my deductions. I took the precaution of leaving a message for the lieutenant to appear at nine-forty, in the event he didn't hear from you."

The professor's fingers felt the minute hand of his watch touch the numeral eight just as the green leather doors swung in at the touch of Lieutenant Cobb.



the corner room

by

CLARENCE ALVA POWELL

**It was only one mistake, the bank job.
But this robbery was easy. Wasn't it?**

MARBAN spread his two wide hands eloquently. How was I to know, he said.

You could have listened, Archer growled. I told you the old man slept in the southeast corner room. What do you do. You climb into the room on the wrong side of the house and kill the wrong man. Now we gotta get out of here and the money's gone to hell.

Sorry, boss, Marban said. Just one of them things, I guess.

Like down in Glory last week, Archer complained. I told you to shake that fellow down and you choke him to death. That cost us another two grand, you know.

What's money, Marban laughed. We know how to get it when we need it.

You know Jimmy Jax, Archer changed the subject suddenly.

I don't know him, Marban answered. I've heard about him—you mean Hy Smeke's trigger man, that is, he was till Hy got bumped off.

That's the one, Archer said. Well, he's coming in with us.

How come, Marban wanted to know. I can't see that he'll be of any use to you and me.

He'll kinda back us up, Archer advised. He's good, you know, can shoot our way out of any trouble we get into.

Yeah, Marban expressed sarcasm. And leave some dead men so the law can chase us.

For Christ's sake, Archer snapped. How many dead men have you left behind us the past year or two.

But strangling them is silent, Marban said. Not like the sound of guns.

Too late anyhow, Archer replied. I've already invited him in. You'll see, too. It'll be good having him with us.

They drifted down to Elmore City where Archer told Marban the pickings would be easy and the profits good. I'll show you, he added, sitting at a table in their room, sketching a rough map. Here we are in the Clyde Hotel, and there, across the street, is the Elmore City Bank. There's a tin can in

there that they call a safe. And there's thirty thousand dollars in that tin can. I've already made a deal with the teller to get us inside.

Boss, Marban said fervently. You sure know how to figure things out. What do we do after we've got the money. Do we come back here or do we skip town.

We don't, Archer explained. That's where Jax comes in. He'll be a block down the street in a parked car. We'll just walk to the car, get in and drive out of town acting like nothing happened.

How about here, Marban asked, gesturing around the room. How do we clear out of the Clyde without somebody being suspicious.

I've told the clerk we're secret agents, Archer replied. I told him we're on the trail of some desperate characters. See, here's my badge.

Well I'll be damned, Marban swore.

That night, an hour or so past midnight, they entered the bank through the front door with no difficulty, as Archer had said, and with pin-point light from the shrouded flashlight were busy on the antique vault when they were snapped erect by the sound of three loud explosions—gun shots—that came from down the street.

Jax, Marban hissed. Jittery Jax.

Archer whirled about. Come on, he snapped. Hurry, we gotta get out of here.

They ran through the darkness to the front door, pushed it open just enough to squeeze through, closed it quietly behind them and walked silently in the opposite direction from where Jax had been waiting for them.

They crossed the street and fell in with the first group of men rushing toward the commotion beyond the bank. Here, Archer said, stopping in front of the Clyde Hotel. We'll wait here and see what's going on.

You know, Archer, Marban said coldly when he knew they would not be heard. You're a Goddamned fool. I told you Jax would be no good for us.

Nobody calls me a . . . Archer began angrily but fell silent. Three men ran up, one of them a policeman. Where's Simpson, the officer asked. Have you seen Simpson around.

No, Archer replied. I haven't seen him. What was the shooting about.

Some fellow in a parked car took a shot at Hunter, nicked him in the right shoulder. Hunter got off two shots, probably missed on account of his shoulder, and the guy got away.



What about a road-block, Archer suggested.

We're trying that, the policeman said. But I think we're too late. He was the getaway driver. Somebody else was trying to break open the safe in the bank but didn't make it.

Marban, Archer said when they were back in their room at the hotel. Don't you ever call me a fool again.

He paced the room silently, for several minutes, in a cold rage. Wait till I get my hands on that Jimmy Jax. Nobody makes a fool out of me.

Marban sat stolidly in his chair. He said nothing but dark wrath smouldered in his eyes.

Archer and Marban remained at the Clyde Hotel for three more days. They were afraid to leave Elmore City too soon following the attempted bank robbery. It was Thursday afternoon and they were planning to get out of town when a knock sounded on the door.

It's not locked, Archer called out.

The door opened and Jimmy Jax walked into the room.

Marban was stunned. Archer leaped to his feet and gasped, You.

Yeah, Jax grinned. It's me all right.

Archer crossed the room swiftly and closed the door, locking it. Now tell me what happened, he said evenly.

I was parked, as we had planned, and it was just about the time when you was in the bank that a policeman leaned on the side of the car and asked me what I was waiting for. I told him I had a date and that she hadn't showed up.

That sounds reasonable, Archer agreed. Go on.

Well, Jimmy Jax continued. He asked me my name. I told him John Jones. He asked me if I knew anybody in town and I said not personally, except Gloria. He seemed to take that for gospel and then asked, Do you happen to know a big fellow, black hair and heavy black

brows, and he went on with a pretty good description of Marban. That worried me right away. I told him No, started to ease the car away and he yelled for me to stop.

The hell you say, Archer exclaimed. What happened then.

I looked back and could see that he was pulling a gun so I took a shot at him and stepped on the gas. Jimmy Jax grinned lamely and added, I think he shot at me twice but missed both times.

I guess that clears you, Archer declared. But I don't like the reflection on Marban. That could lead to trouble.

How come, Marban scowled, thinking things over. How come me more than you.

Forget it, Archer said. We better get the hell out of here. But we can't all leave together.

Why now, Jax grinned. I ditched the car I had that night, switched with a buddy in Dallas and, besides, with my moustache and wearing these glasses . . . he shrugged.

Safe enough, I'd say, Archer announced. We can ride out together. Let's get going.

They were well out of Elmore City when Jax asked, Where to, boss.

I've been thinking, Archer said slowly. Maybe Cottage Grove. Do you know where that is.

Why there, Marban asked, still sullen, not liking the circumstances.

I did a turn for a fellow there once, pretended I was the law, Archer said. He's prominent, lives in a big house with a safe in it. He must have ten thousand, or more, in that safe. I figure we can use it.

Lead on, Jax grinned again. Just show me the way.

THEY ARRIVED in Cottage Grove the next afternoon. It was a small, prosperous town and Archer, urging Jax not to drive too closely, showed them the house. We'll scout the place after dark, he said. I'll explain the layout to you later, just before we go in to see the old gent.

The three ate in the hotel dining-room and, following the hasty repast, strolled briefly down the main street. Archer, sizing up the situation, said, Jax, I'll show Marban the layout around that house. What say we meet you here in a half hour.

Okay, boss, the other said. I'll be here.

They turned down a side street for two blocks and right a half block. That's the back of the house, Archer explained to Marban. There's two bedrooms back and the gent that lives there sleeps in the one on the

right. We gotta put him out of the way.

Marban muttered, Now this I like. It's more like old times. I know how to get here boss, and I sure as hell know how to get out of here.

They rejoined Jimmy Jax, made final preparations, Marban to stay at the hotel and the other two to visit the old man.

We gotta check the layout inside the house, Archer explained. We gotta know where that safe is.

It's the dough inside the safe that I wanna see, Jimmy Jax exclaimed.

Well, Archer said, turning to Marban. How about one or two o'clock. How does one-thirty strike you.

Right, Marban replied and turned toward the hotel.

Archer and Jax set out for the house. Half way there, Archer said, This is a fix, Jax. My old man lives there, sleeps upstairs.

Jimmy Jax waited, knowing there was more to come.

There's two bedrooms at the back, Archer said. I'll sleep in the one on the left and you'll take the room on the right.

Jax still said nothing, and they were drawing close to the house.

Archer said softly, Marban will climb in through your window at one-thirty in the

morning. You know what to do.

I figured he was in the way, Jax murmured.

Remember, Archer whispered as he knocked on the door. Be damned sure you don't miss. If you do you'll never know anything about it.

I won't miss, Jimmy Jax assured him.

Marban noted the time, one o'clock and most people would be asleep by now. Archer had said about one-thirty.

I'll leave early, he muttered. Take a look at the streets, see if any cops are around and, besides, I don't trust that Jimmy Jax.

He didn't want the night-clerk to see him leave and that meant the window. Turning off the light and peering down into the alley, he calculated a ten or eleven foot drop.

Marban unlocked the door, placed the key on the night-stand and, raising the sash, listened. He heard no sounds, decided the place was dead and crawled through the window. He hung to the sill with one hand, lowered the sash with the other and dropped to the ground.

The streets were deserted, meeting only a weaving drunk and farther on a teen-ager hurrying home. Marban had taken the opposite direction, turned left two blocks to Beacon Street and swinging back approached the front of the house. The street was tree-sheltered, deep in shadow and no lights on in the block.

Except for Marban's steps, all was quiet.

He crept down the right side of the house, turned the corner and paused, crouched, beneath the window. Silence held him and he waited, sensing the deep breathing of sleep. The window raised under his firm pressure and he passed through the opening, a noiseless shadow.

Marban climbed from the window a bare three minutes later. He cast one glance back into the gloom at the crumpled figure sprawled on the bed. He lowered the sash cautiously, momentarily uncertain, and then moved off through the darkness wondering vaguely if that was the room Archer meant. Or had he climbed in through the wrong window and killed the wrong man again.



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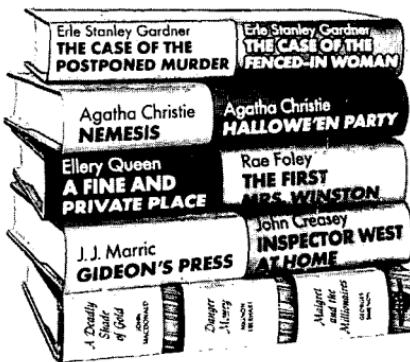
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